

Bartłomiej Błaszkwicz

MEDIEVAL CONTEXTS
IN MODERN FANTASY FICTION:
J. R. R. Tolkien and George R. R. Martin

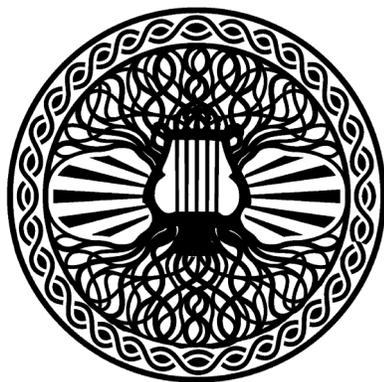


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God quite hem ther mede!

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Also, a preliminary version of the argument in *Chapter I* was published in the Polish article “Elendil i Nymeria. O micie heroicznym w światach wtórnych”, published in the volume entitled *Epos: od Homera do Martina* (eds. B. Błaszkiwicz, J. Godlewicz-Adamiec), Gdańsk: Katedra 2019.

Introduction

The Past in the Heroic Tradition

I. Part One – An Account of the Argument

Although the modern origins of high fantasy may be traced back to the romance novels of William Morris from the turn of the twentieth century, or to the Conan-cycle novels of Robert R. Howard written in the 1930s, it was around the 1950s that high fantasy emerged as a definable, autonomous subgenre of modern fantasy fiction. Not long thereafter, in the 1970s, the first attempts were made at providing a workable definition of the new phenomenon¹ – the first coming in a 1971 essay by the American author Lloyd Chudley Alexander, entitled *High Fantasy and Heroic Romance*. Alexander’s definition already contains all the crucial elements by reference to which this particular kind of fantasy writing has been defined ever since. As the defining characteristics of the genre, Alexander mentions the creation of an autonomous, fully distinct fictional world, a strong reliance upon recourse to a “mythological” layer in the created reality, an indebtedness to the literary tradition and conventions of genres such as the epic and the romance, through which the heroic mode had been customarily expressed, and an elusive propensity to address certain special “areas of feeling” (Alexander 1971) which are expressible

¹ For more context on the fantastic literature of the period, see Mendlesohn/James 2012: 61-74.

in no other genre in quite the same way. Indeed, the reliance on the creation of a secondary world with a premodern, medievalised setting and imagery, as well as adherence to a number narrative patterns which emerge in the context of the epic and the romance, has resulted in the related term of “heroic fantasy” being also applied in the context of the most recognisable examples of high fantasy texts.² This is, no doubt, a simple consequence of the fact that high fantasy depends on the conventions and setting for the heroic literary tradition to achieve the “high” scope of aesthetic and ethical reference.

The clearly definable character of high fantasy is testimony to a uniform aesthetic and ideological outlook shared by the bulk of the authors whose work served to define the normative and stylistic boundaries of the genre, and by the expectations of the audience who chose to grant their attention to this newly emergent literary tradition. It may be said that at the origins of the genre lay an impulse to distance oneself from the confines of the nineteenth century aesthetics of formal realism, which may have elevated the newly refined genre of the novel to the rank of the major form of literary expression, capable of handling the fine detail of the individual psychology and the sophisticated context of social interaction, but which also rid itself of the apparatus to address the higher, more spiritual aspects which contribute to the fullness of human existential experience. Thus it appears that what lies behind Alexander’s reference to the unique “areas of feeling” is an echo of the Tolkienian notions of Recovery, Escape and Consolation, which denote the destined aims of literary composition in the fantastic mode designed to terminate in the spiritually uplifting sensation of the *Eucatastrophe*.

Thus, avoiding the avowedly narrowed scope of the formal realist fiction on the one hand, and the chaos and decadence of modernism and postmodernism, on the other, high fantasy has always drawn both inspiration and formal instruction from the genres through which profound existential topics were once expressed. By drawing

² Shippey uses the term in reference to Tolkien in his *J. R. R. Tolkien: Author of the Century* (Shippey 2001: 320), while the nature of the term’s relation to the genres of the epic and the romance is further explored in Honegger 2010: 61-69, who also uses the term “heroic fantasy” throughout in relation to Tolkien’s work.

upon the literary legacy of the epic and the romance, high fantasy became shaped and defined by its contact with the literary and cultural heritage of the European Middle Ages, which is in itself a reflection and consequence of the fact that it is through contact with the medieval culture that the most intimate and immediate relation may be achieved, in the modern-day environment, with the heroic literary tradition. Whether in the context of a warm appreciation, as is the case for J. R. R. Tolkien, or C. S. Lewis, or a subversive appropriation, as, for instance, the case would be for Poul Anderson, the medieval context has become one of the most vital cornerstones of literary composition within the genre of heroic fantasy because it is through this historical context that the heroic literary tradition makes the most direct contact with modern European culture.

Furthermore, the way in which this context finds its way into the literary texture of modern high fantasy and is manifested therein is by no means limited to the conscious use of medieval epic or courtly romance conventions, or the recreation of a medievalised, pre-modern setting for the fictional secondary world, where the main action of a narrative takes place. What a more profound, organic contact with the culture of the Middle Ages will entail, in the case of the literary works of the most outstanding merit, is a creative dialogue with the fine detail of medieval aesthetic decorum and some of the most fundamental aspects of the human cognition and psychology, which defined the specificity of the medieval period against the context of the antecedent and the subsequent periods in the complex cultural history of human civilisations.

Consequently, one may say that the general perception of the nature and distinct quality of high fantasy has, for the most part, remained unchallenged and no major reformulation of the genetic characteristics of this type of fantasy has ever been necessary. Thus, while the terms “heroic”, “high” or “epic” fantasy have all been used by various scholars over the last four decades to denote the genre in question, they have been, for the most part, interchanged in reflection of which aspect of the genre a particular analysis was most directly concerned with. Typically, the genre has been called “epic”, or ‘heroic fantasy’ when the aspect of the medieval heritage is perceived as the most crucial, while the term “high fantasy” seems

to invariably bring to the fore the genre's customary reliance on the fully immersive secondary-world setting.³

As such, heroic fantasy functions in the contemporary critical perception, as well as commercial market context, as a distinct, recognisable genre of fantasy fiction, alongside the related genres of comic fantasy, urban fantasy, dark fantasy, and historical fantasy. Also, some critics have sought to draw a more systemic parallel between the concept of “high fantasy” and the inevitable terminological equivalent of “low fantasy” (i.e. Wolfe 1986: 67). The narratives included within this definition would typically feature an intrusion of fantastic elements upon a realistic setting, which would correspond to, or mirror, the primary reality. As such, low fantasy would not make use of the concept of the secondary world and it would also be based on an implicit assumption that the fantastic elements are essentially marked as a negative, corrupting influence on the primary reality. If so defined, low fantasy narratives would indeed constitute the polar opposite of the philosophy implicit in high fantasy fiction, which seems to have never fundamentally departed from the Tolkienian idea of the ennobling potential of fantastic imagery.

Thus, subsequent generations of critics honed Alexander's definition by further refining its constituent elements. Thus, for instance, much valuable normative work has since been conducted on the nature and character of the secondary world. It could in fact be argued that it was the birth of the classic Tolkienian heroic fantasy that redirected the focus of the critical perception from seeing fantasy as a subordinate mode of expression in contemporary realist prose (as it was effectively treated by the likes of Tzvetan Todorov or Rosemary Jackson⁴) to treating it as an autonomous literary genre with a distinct tradition, poetics and aesthetic philosophy.

³ Compare the use of the terms by Wolfe (2012: 19), Kaveney (2012: 216), or Butler (2012: 118). See also the respective entries in Gary K. Wolfe's *Critical Terms for Science Fiction and Fantasy* (Wolfe 1986: 31, 52).

⁴ Meaning, of course, specifically, Todorov's 1973 *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* and Jackson's 1981 *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion*. Compare here the diverging contemporaneous approach adopted in Lin Carter's 1973 *Imaginary Worlds* (passim.), or in the subchapter on Tolkien's *On Fairy Stories* in Colin N. Manlove's *Modern Fantasy: Five Studies* (1975: 158-170).

Thus one finds an extended discussion of Tolkien's reformulation of the mythical patterns already in A. C. Petty's 1979 *One Ring to Bind Them All: Tolkien's Mythology*, while J. H. Timmerman in his 1983 *Other Worlds: The Fantasy Genre* provided an incisive discussion of the creative practice involved in designing the fantastic secondary world, followed by a discussion of the Tolkienian concept of the secondary world in the light of Tolkien's own work. Of similar character is E. Little's in-depth discussion of Tolkien's use of the secondary world models in his 1984 *The Fantasts* (Little 1984: 13-38). Next, Ann Swinfen, in her *Defence of Fantasy*, systematised the term "secondary world" against other forms of fantasy literature (1984: 75-99). Of the later critical statements on the topic one would surely need to mention C. Manlove's discussion of Tolkienian tradition of the secondary world fantasy in his 1999 *The Fantasy Literature of England* (Manlove 1999: 37-63) and F. Mendlesohn's 2007 publication *Rhetorics of Fantasy*, which proposes a reformulated, four-category classification of fantasy, whereby the typical setting of the majority of high fantasy texts would come under the term "immersive fantasy" (2008: 59-113), although the critic suggests that *The Lord of the Rings* should be treated as an example of *portal fantasy* (Mendlesohn 2008: 2).

Most recently, Mark J. P. Wolf's seminal work *Building Imaginary Worlds* seeks to redefine the traditional concepts of "subcreation" and secondary world in the context of the new imaginative possibilities offered by contemporary technological developments, which integrates traditional forms of textual creativity in the sphere of the new social media. Wolfe's discussion of the topic constitutes an attempt to introduce a normative categorisation of the creative autonomy of the fantasy world based on the fictional world's relation with the empirical consensual outlook on the primary reality (Wolf 2012: 20-51).

The most comprehensive joint scholarly effort at applying Wolf's outlook to the Tolkienian philosophy of the secondary world has undoubtedly been the 2019 volume *Sub-creating Arda* (ed. Fimi and Honegger) which seeks to extend the normative framework of Wolf's theory to tackle issues such as the creation of various aspects of the fictional space in the textual narrative, or such aspects like focalisation, or the role of the tradition of language and culture.

Similarly, the question of the indebtedness of high fantasy to the heroic tradition has been the subject of much critical discussion in the course of the last four decades. The use of the heroic mode and the medieval literary tradition was already discussed in the earliest academic publications concerning the work of Tolkien. W. H. Auden explored the topic already in his 1962 essay *The Quest Hero*, and the issue was further referred to throughout the 1960s and 1970s criticism of Tolkien (see, for instance, Evans 1972: 58-90, Carter 1969: 96-133). Then, during the 1980s, the role of the heroic tradition in the work of Tolkien was the cornerstone of such seminal publications as T. Shippey's *The Road to Middle-earth*.

Over the last three decades, the growing scholarly interest in the way in which Tolkien's work aspired to reconnect with the heritage of the heroic literary tradition has resulted in the publication of a number of outstanding studies on the topic. Among these, one need mention T. Shippey's 2001 *J. R. R. Tolkien: Author of the Century*, or his 2007 collection *Roots and Branches*, as well as J. Chance's 2001 *Tolkien's Art: A Mythology for England*, or the collections *Tolkien and the Invention of the Myth* (2004), R. Rorabeck's *Tolkien's Heroic Quest* (2008), M. Dickerson's *Following Gandalf: Epic Battles and Moral Victory in the Lord of the Rings* (2003), E. M. Stephen's *Hobbit to Hero: The Making of Tolkien's King* (2012), M. Simonson's *The Lord of the Rings and the Western Narrative Tradition* (2008), V. Flieger's *Interrupted Music: The Making of Tolkien's Mythology* (2005) and *A Question of Time: J. R. R. Tolkien's Road to Faërie* (1997). Other important works in this particular strand of Tolkienian studies are undoubtedly the ones which explore the specifically medieval dimension of the heroic tradition. Among these one may mention A. Amendt-Raduege's "*The Sweet and the Bitter*": *Death and Dying in J. R. R. Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings*, G. Clark and D. Timmons's collection *J. R. R. Tolkien and his Literary Resonances* (2000), and J. Chance's collection *Tolkien the Medievalist* (2003), or S. D. Lee, Stuart and D. E. Solopova's *The Keys to Middle-earth: Discovering Medieval Literature Through the Fiction of J. R. R. Tolkien* (2005).

It is becoming apparent that the main achievement of the understandably much more recent and still relatively modest critical tradition of studies concerned with the work of George R. R. Martin

has already been successful in laying foundations for the author's recognition as a major contributor to the modern high fantasy tradition. In the wake of the critical analysis of many key aspects of George R. R. Martin's artistic vision, the recognition of the complexity and scope of the author's work in the genre of high fantasy, as well as his ability to develop a serious dialogue with literary legacy of the medieval heroic tradition is gradually, but steadily, becoming more universal. Of the critical works concerned with the work of George R. R. Martin, the most relevant are C. Larrington's *Winter is Coming: The Medieval World of Game of Thrones* (2016), C. P. Jamison's *Chivalry in Westeros: The Knightly Code of A Song of Ice and Fire* (2018) and S. Carroll's *Medievalism in A Song of Ice and Fire and Game of Thrones* (2018).

The present volume aims to make a modest contribution to this critical tradition. It deals with the work of the two arguably most significant of modern fantasy authors, whose achievement has been to create a complex body of associated texts which collectively develop a literary vision of an autonomous, immersive secondary world where the conventions of modern fantasy fiction are employed in a dialogue with the heroic literary tradition. The specific tradition which constitutes the most direct focus of the analysis here is the culture of the High Middle Ages, as reflected in the literary tradition of the Middle-English romance and epic literature.

While the scope and textual complexity of the respective fictional world are essentially compatible, the divergent cultural background and differing attitudes of J.R. R. Tolkien and George R. R. Martin result in contrastive approaches the two authors take towards various aspects of the medieval tradition in creating their respective literary visions.

The general idea for this volume, therefore, is to present a comprehensive assessment of a continuum of aspects of the medieval literary and cultural legacy in the context of which the work of the two authors relates to the medieval heritage immanent in the genre of heroic fantasy. The aim for the volume is to explore facets of the medieval heritage which either have hitherto not been tackled in criticism, or which may benefit from contact with methodologies and approaches that are either newly developed, or have not previously been invoked in discussions of the topic in question.

This general design is meant to reflect a certain underlying philosophy regarding high fantasy's relationship with the medieval tradition which is adopted throughout, and which is inspired by Egbert J. Bakker's conception of the "epic remembering". In his study of the ways in which the process of remembering and active recollection is manifested in the Homeric epics, Bakker writes about memory being "medially and therefore historically contingent" (Bakker 2008: 65). He further defines the mode by which memory functions in oral, heroic societies as "the collective mentality of a society that places fundamental authority in a remote past and considers [...] the records of the achievements of the ancestors that is codified in the epic tradition, to be the model for excellence in the present. In such a mentality, epic is traditional because it has to remember, evoke, a part that is different from the audience's present-day world" (Bakker 2008: 66). Within this context Bakker proceeds to define the act of remembering within the heroic textual tradition as an intuitive, quasi-ritualistic act of re-enactment, an "activation of memory" which "is not just physical, [...] but also mental or spiritual [...]" (Bakker 2008: 71). The epic remembering is thus a present state of active recollection of the past in a currently performed activity. The present volume aims to perceive the secondary-world creation in modern high fantasy as an act of remembering and active recalling of the past literary and cultural tradition in a way which is parallel to the conception discussed by Bakker. Within this understanding, modern fantasy texts constitute acts of reliving the tradition of the past in the process of the successive unveiling of the narrative action. Consequently, the relationship of the modern texts with their medieval antecedents is activated not solely through acts of direct, conscious and deliberate influence realised in the form of intertextual, or metatextual correspondences or references, but it also incorporates relations created by the cultural and literary tradition being remodelled or channelled into new forms, in the process of the juxtaposition of the different cultural backgrounds, literary traditions or mental and cognitive habits of the epochs and civilisations separated in diachronic and synchronic sense. Just like the medieval civilisation found its own unique reformulation of the heroic tradition, which reflected the specific cultural context of the epoch

where the modes of cultural interaction typical of the oral and the literate society remain in a dynamic process of constant interaction throughout the period, so modern high fantasy is constantly, though sometimes inadvertently, engaged in a cultural process whereby the cultural heritage of the past is redefined and reformulated in the dynamic context of the present. The aim of the present argument is thus to discuss a number of different aspects where one may trace forms of relationship between the medieval cultural traditions and modern high fantasy fiction.

Therefore, the focus of the analysis moves progressively through various layers of literary composition. It starts with a discussion of the overtly intertextual references to the medieval literary tradition. Hence, although the consecutive chapters are united in their concern with the hierarchy of aspects in which the medieval tradition asserts itself in the work of the two fantasy authors, they are also designed as a sequence of largely autonomous, methodologically distinct studies, reflecting the variety of areas which offer themselves for discussion in the context of these two complex secondary worlds.

First, as a sort of overture, or prelude, to the subsequent analysis, within this introductory chapter we will briefly examine the continuity of tradition between the medieval literary texts belonging to the heroic tradition and the work of Tolkien and Martin, based on the example of one particular motif. Namely, this is the motif whereby, during a pause in the sequence of the events of the plot, the protagonists take a backward reflective look to re-establish and re-evaluate their mental connection to momentous deeds, events and personages, whose impact upon the textual present determined the characters' perception of the significance of the past.

The aim of this initial section is to stress how close and continuous the link is between the medieval narrative tradition of heroic literature and the work of Tolkien and Martin, and how important the medieval heritage is in terms of determining the narrative style and decisively influencing the characters and nature of the secondary worlds created by the two respective authors.

Subsequently, in the first fully analytical chapter (Chapter I), an attempt is made to extend the argument by presenting an account of the way in which Tolkien and Martin seek to recreate, within their

respective secondary worlds, the mythical layer of cultural reference which plays such a decisive part in the heroic literary tradition of the epic and the romance. Chapter I takes a more systemic look at the way in which the heroic legacy of a particular culture is resident in the body of myths which preserve the consciousness of the past and is reflected in its literary tradition. It further examines how the medieval understanding of the concept of myth is reflected and transformed in the fiction of Tolkien and Martin. After an overview of the way myth functions in the partly oral environment of medieval culture, there follows an in-depth discussion of one corresponding myth in the work of the two respective authors. Specifically, we examine in detail the role and character of two closely compatible heroic myths functioning within the two respective secondary worlds: the myth of Elendil, the High King of Arnor and of Gondor and of Nymeria, Princess of the Roynar and the Queen of Dorne. The overall aim is to discuss the impact of the mythical layer upon the fictional reality of the narrative, in both the emic and etic dimensions, i.e. as an element determining the perception of fictional secondary world by the characters involved in the main progress of the narrative, and as an element conditioning the perception of the secondary world by the primary-world audience of the text.

In terms of the methodology adopted for the analysis, the aim is to make more extended and direct use of the analytical methods developed in the context of anthropological and socio-historical studies of oral, or partly oral, traditional cultures. Thus the argument seeks here to augment and reinforce the traditional Lord and Parry approach of oral-formulaic studies as practiced in the medieval context in the work by Mark Amodio (1994; 2004), M. Borroff (1962), and E. B. Vitz (Vitz 1999) with the anthropological approach developed in cultural socio-cultural studies by W. J. Ong (1995), Jan Assmann (2008; 2015), Aleida Assmann (2013), Paul Connerton (2006), and Eric A. Havelock (1986). A very vital part of the adopted methodology is here to establish a connection between this critical tradition and the scholarly work on the cultural context of the medieval approaches to textuality as developed in the work of R. Morse (Morse 1991), W. Ryding (1971) and M. Carruthers (1992). The methodology adopted throughout this volume thus seeks to incorporate the

traditional close-reading approach to textual analysis within the larger context of current forms of cultural studies. Importantly, the critical approach represented by Jan and Alida Assmann has not hitherto been applied to textual analysis within English-language literary criticism.

The second analytical chapter is concerned with the question of how the medieval literary tradition affects the way in which a modern fantasy text forms the key elements of the imagery and the setting of the fictional, secondary world. Chapter II takes the motif of the forest as an example and examines in detail its function in the Middle English literary tradition, before tracing the continuity of motifs and narrative perspectives concerning the presentation and function of the forest in the work of Tolkien and Martin.

The argument is here maintained in the critical tradition developed by the scholarly work concerned with the medieval context of the motif of the forest (e.g. C. Saunders 1993 and A. Classen 2015). No less important here is the critical legacy of studies concerned with the role of Nature in general, and specifically the forest, in the work of Tolkien. The argument is here immensely indebted to publications by M. Dickerson and J. Evans (2006), H. Conrad-O'Brian and G. Hynes (2013), V. Flieger (2000; 2003), L. Campbell (2011), and S. Jeffers (2014).

The aim of the argument is here to provide a comprehensive discussion of the role played by the motif of the forest in the two respective secondary worlds in the context of the most recent critical tendencies in ecocriticism. Consequently, the analysis introduces a methodological distinction between the following terms:

- “forest environment”, which means the forest as an element of the spatial setting of the narrative,
- “forest habitat”, which denotes the forest as an element of the fictional world perceived from the point of view of the characters of the narrative and interactive with them, and lastly
- “forest ecosystem”, which refers to the forest as an autonomous agent in the narrative, which possesses individual identity and fulfils a role akin to that of other living entities, including characters belonging to typically “rational” species.

The aim is thus to perceive the forest not solely as an element of the setting (as has hitherto been most common), but as an organism

with a distinct identity independently interacting with other characters of the narrative reality. The overriding concern of the argument at this point is to trace how the medieval literary tradition affected the conception of the forest in each of these three isolated aspects.

The third and final chapter is concerned with the medieval heritage on the cognitive level. The first section presents how medieval literary composition is determined by the specificity of the contemporaneous perception of the aural space (like, for instance, the function of sonic perspective in the creation of the fictional space) and how it affects both the lexical and the aesthetic aspect of literary composition. Then a detailed discussion of the same element of the work of Tolkien and Martin seeks to juxtapose them against the medieval literary context.

The methodology adopted in this chapter stems from the classic work on the issue of the cultural context of human space cognition by A. Guriewicz (1973), P. Zumthor (1993) and J. R. Martin (1977). Again, the approach represented by these scholars has not hitherto been applied in a wider sense in English-language critical studies. The aim is to renew critical interest in the ground-breaking work done by these scholars, which focuses on the issue of the medieval perception of space. The argument developed in Chapter III transposes the findings arrived at by this particular school of literary and cultural criticism onto the medieval aural perception, the concept of acoustic space and the function of the sonic perspective. Such a widening of the methodological approach opens up a completely new perspective in the study of a most vital element of medieval cognition. It allows us to reformulate our understanding of how the cultural and cognitive propensities of the medieval mind which relate to aural sensation affect the key aspect of literary composition within texts created during the period. Furthermore, it enables us to trace how the textual specificity of the medieval texts in this key aspect may have affected modern narratives which remain in intertextual, or metatextual, contact with the medieval tradition. Alternatively, it allows us to observe how the pre-modern setting of contemporary high fantasy work differs in character from the medieval models by virtue of being based on a divergent mode of the aural space perception.

The focus of Chapter III is thus concerned not with direct or indirect influences of any form, but with tracing out cultural analogues. Consequently, it seeks to analyse how literary texts created in the modern epoch, where the prevalent modes of cognition differ markedly from those obtaining in the medieval period, develop the aural space of narratives which function in the context of a medievalised setting modelled on the conventionalised setting of medieval narratives. Thus the context of the medieval tradition is here treated as providing an augmented analytical depth which opens up a new perspective on the character of this particular element of the artistic design and individual specificity of the secondary worlds of modern fantasy. Consequently, the aim of Chapter III is to introduce a new methodological dimension into the study of both medieval culture and the modern phenomena relating to medievalism.

All in all, the various stages of the argument conducted within the present volume aim to contribute to a comprehensive and flexible picture of the possible forms in which the medieval cultural and literary heritage may interact with modern literary texts belonging to a genre which remains indebted to that heritage and continues to function in reference to that context. The aim throughout the argument is to apply a flexible methodological apparatus in order to account for the distinctive nature of the medieval heritage as a vital aspect shedding new light on the work of authors whose output has shaped and defined the modern genre of high fantasy.

Part TWO – The Backward Look

As a prelude to the discussion of the various forms of cultural continuity which link the particular aspects of literary composition by which the work of J. R. R. Tolkien and George R. R. Martin invokes the complex, interrelated layers of literary tradition to be found within the European medieval civilisation, we shall first make a few remarks about how the overt attitudes and understanding of the past functions within the texture of classic literary texts of the heroic tradition.

Our journey effectively begins at the meeting point of the oral and literate worlds, in the verses of *Beowulf*. Here, as we witness some of that overwhelmingly intimate and ever-present sense of the legacy of the past which defined the ancient oral civilisations being gathered and framed in the historical finality of the written composition, we find the fulcrum against which our discussion of the sense of the past in the subsequent literate heroic traditions may be comfortably anchored. As Professor Tolkien himself observed in his study of the poem, the story we follow here functions at the crosscut between a legend steeped in the marvellous and the orally perpetuated history of the ancient households of the Teutonic peoples of Northern Europe around whom the communal sense of identity and the perception of cultural continuity had been developed (Tolkien 2014: 205–207).

It is thus a sense of the organic link with the legacy of the heroic past that takes the story of the young nephew of the king of the Geats, who sets out to confront a humanoid monster who nightly invades the royal mead hall of the neighbouring King Hrothgar, the story of an old king dying after a victorious confrontation with a dragon, which, recklessly awakened, prowls continually upon his subjects, and elevates it to embody the communal perception of heroic grandeur. This form of perception is abstracted out of, and validated, by the tribal society's experience of history. It is in this way that the story enters the epic register forged by generations of oral performers before its descent into the fixed locality of the manuscript.

Thus it is against the conceptual framework which the society has developed for the expression of the heroic, and which is enshrined in the catalogued reservoir of the formulae woven intricately through the fabric of the poem in systems of formulaic distribution, that the greatness of the epic hero is measured. It is in this context that each individual story is tested, as it is given expression by being cast into a pattern of formulaic phrases and themes.

Among these numerous themes which collectively facilitate the progress of the oral heroic narrative we will find one which takes advantage of the momentary suspension of the narrative to allow the characters upon whose shoulders the weight of the heroic action is bestowed to take a look back to measure their deeds against the

achievements of their predecessors, now enshrined in oral memory of the communal legend.

In these rare moments of historical insight the heroic pathos becomes evoked from the narrative in the wake of an explicit confrontation between the immediate, dramatic exigencies of characters and their equivalents in the fortunes of the legendary heroes of the past, whose noble deeds have come to stand as a paragon of heroic achievement. In this way it is through the link with the past and with the communal history that the protagonists' identity is determined in a heroic text.

Thus, amid the robust merrymaking at the feast in King Hrothgar's hall called after young Beowulf's defeat of Grendel, the accomplished bard unveils before his audience the story of Sigemund – a heroic warrior known also from the Volsung saga⁵:

Hwílum heaþorófe hléapan léton
 on geflit faran fealwe méaras
 ðaér him foldwegas fægere þúhton
 cystum cúðe. Hwílum cyninges þegn
 guma gilphlæden gidða gemyndig
 sé ðe ealfela ealdgesegen
 worn gemunde word óþer fand
 sóðe gebunden· secg eft ongan
 síð Béowulfes snyttrum styrian
 ond on spéd wrecan spel geráde,
 wordum wrixlan· wélhwylc gecwæð
 þæt hé fram Sigemunde secgan hyrde
 ellendaédum: uncúþes fela
 Wælsinges gewin wíde síðas
 þára þe gumena bearn gearwe ne wiston
 faéhðe ond fyrena búton Fitela mid hine,
 þonne hé swulces hwæt secgan wolde
 éám his nefan swá hie á waéron
 æt níða gehwám nýdgesteallan;

(*Beowulf*, 864–898).

⁵ For a more extensive and in-depth context on the heroic dimension of Beowulf see the study by S. Gwara, to which the present study is greatly indebted, see Gwara 2008; 12- 34; 59-134; 311- 349.

The heroic tale of Sigemund's⁶ defeat of the dragon is conjured up out of the reservoir of traditional stories for a number of reasons. Most immediately, of course, because it corresponds in terms of its narrative character and celebratory tone to the mood of the occasion. Yet because one event links here across history with another, each time when a suitable occasion arises for the recounting of the heroic deeds of the past, the present endeavour is measured against the standard of hardship and glory encoded in the heroic song.

Thus recalling the story of the son of Sigemund provides the ultimate proof of the noble quality of Beowulf's contest and victory, but also a challenge to his identity and a warning against succumbing to the weaknesses against which the heroes of the past had to contend. Hence it constitutes the ultimate compliment towards the guest, because to live up to the standard of the mythical past constitutes the ultimate praise that may be bestowed upon the hero of the present occasion. In this way the present heroic identity of the young nobleman is articulated through an echo of the past. In this way the mythical past is once again validated in its role as a paradigm of nobility and, by reaching out to the myth, the present cases of outstanding achievement may be elevated to the timelessness that is only reachable by abstracting the heroic quality out of the accumulated weight of the past.

Just as the present needs myth to provide a measure of greatness, so is myth paradoxically only able to preserve its timeless character through constant feedback from the present reality. As one justifies and rejuvenates the other, it is through this symbiotic relationship that the cultural continuity of the community is manifested and perpetuated. In this way, the consciousness of the past enhances the glory of the present achievement, but it also elevates the experience of suffering, failure, defeat and death out of the seemingly pointless squalor it may seem to represent in the narrow context of individual life. To relive the former glories of one's life and the lives of the great ones before us at the moment when the final tragedy seems to envelop and swallow up one's lifetime achievement offers a consolation

⁶ The account provided here by the bard differs from the later versions of the story appearing in Old Norse mythology, where the killing of the dragon is attributed to Sigemund's son, Sigurd.

which bestows a heroic quality on individual tragedy, as it too echoes against its precedents in the heroic past.

Consequently, in the final verses of *Beowulf*, when the old king of the Geats is dying of the wounds he received in the confrontation with the dragon, he recalls the times of his youth spent in the hall of King Hredel:

Fela ic on giogoðe guðræsa genæs,
 orleghwila; ic þæt eall gemon
 Ic wæs syfanwintre, þa mec sinca baldor,
 freawine folca æt minum fæder genam;
 heold mec ond hæfde Hreðel cyning,
 geaf me sinc ond symbel, sibbe gemunde;
 næs ic him to life laðra owihte,
 beorn in burgum, þonne his bearna hwylc,
 Herebeald ond Hæðcyn oððe Hygelac min.
 Wæs þam yldestan ungedefelice
 mæges dædum morþorbed stred,
 syððan hyne Hæðcyn of hornbogan,
 his freawine flane geswencte,
 miste mercelses ond his mæg ofscet,
 broðor oðerne blodigan gare.
 Þæt wæs feohleas gefeohht, fyrenum gesyngad,
 hreðre hygemeðe; sceolde hwæðre swa þeah
 æðeling unwrecen ealdres linnan.

Beowulf, 2426–2443.

Here the personal memory becomes sucked in and swallowed up into the great treasure hoard of heroic stories to which the story of Beowulf will now be added and through which its longevity and continued significance will be henceforth ensured. The fact that the young Beowulf learned the art of military strategist, loyal vassal and feudal leader from the personal example of renowned kings such as Hredel or Hygelak positions his life in the continuity of heroic endeavour which stretches way back to the foundations of the communal identity and the feudal social order.

Another vital element which will become ever more important as, moving in time towards the High Middle Ages, we see the exigencies

of the individual life beginning to function less in the context of the “wyrð” and becoming more the domain of Divine Providence, is the tropological function of the example of the past. As the eschatological glory of the ultimate felicitous climax of history at the end of time emerges to balance the mythical aura of the grandeur of the past, so the struggles of personal life will be henceforth perceived and justified as individual contributions to the universal ethical struggle which constitutes the cornerstone of the Christian vision of history. Yet, although the Christian perspective may frequently provide the overruling justification and impetus behind the individual heroics, the ancient practice of seeking a defining context for the examples of personal achievement and personal tragedy in the precedents of the past never truly loses its significance in any major literary text whereby the tradition of heroic literature is carried on during the high medieval period.

Such is the case in the arguably most heroic of all Middle English literary texts – the alliterative *Morte Arthure*.⁷ As this poem is in a defining way indebted to the formulaic tradition of oral poetics through which the heroic literary tradition had once found its first classic articulation, it will come as no particular surprise that the elegiac theme finds its expression in the poem in a familiar sounding scene where a doomed, aging monarch confronts his legacy against the greatness of the past as the poem’s underlying context emerges to explicitly confront its protagonist. Thus, when King Arthur undertakes his final, desperate sea voyage as he struggles against time to return to England to face the rebellion of Mordred – his royal nephew and designated caretaker of the feudal administration – he experiences in his sleep an allegorical vision where the universal history blends with a premonition of his own imminent defeat and death.

The vision is ushered in through a description of a hostile wilderness from which the dreamer flees into a landscape reminiscent of the contemporaneous courtly dream allegories, with images replete with natural fertility and the soothing tranquillity of a cultivated natural enclosure. Into this setting descends the goddess of Fortune

⁷ On the epic tradition in the alliterative *Morte Arthure* see Rondolone 1994: 207-240; Hartwood 1994: 241-287; Davenport 2004: 210-237.

– the standard high medieval allegorical embodiment of the inherent instability of earthly existence – equipped with the indispensable Wheel:

About sho whirled a wheel with her white handes,
 Overwhelm all quaintly the wheel, as sho sholde;
 The rowel was red gold with real stones,
 Railed with riches and rubies ynow;
 The spekes was splented all with speldes of silver,
 The space of a spere-lenghe springand full fair;
 There-on was a chair of chalk-white silver
 And checkered with charbocle changing of hewes
 Upon the compass there cleved kinges on row,
 With crowns of clere gold that cracked in sonder;
 Six was of that settle full sodenlich fallen,
 Ilk a segge by himself and said these wordes:
 ‘That ever I regned on this roo me rewes it ever!
 Was never roy so rich that regned in erthe!
 When I rode in my rout rought I nought elles
 But rivaye and revel and raunson the pople!
 And thus I drive forth my dayes whiles I drie might,
 And therefore derflich I am damned for ever!

Morte Arthure, 3260–3277.

As the allegorical vision of the earthly history unveils before the inward eye of the dreaming monarch, we will surely observe that, instead of a tangled history of the early feudal societies, the reference point for the communal orientation in the past is now the hierarchical, linear scheme which organises and classifies the whole of the universal history in relation to Christian eschatology. The idea of the inherent fickleness of the *Rota Fortunae*⁸ had already become the focus of the staple complaint in the times of classical antiquity, arguably finding its arguably most eloquent treatment in Boethus’ *Consolation of Philosophy*. By the turn of the fourteen century, when *Morte Arthure* was composed, it had long replaced the concept of the *wyrd* as a conceptual projection of the idea of fate. By this time also

⁸ For more background see Robinson 1946: 207-216.

the supposed instability of the sublunary world becomes the specifically local consequence of the original sin while the seemingly erratic meanders of history are not yet incorporated into a meaningful pattern of the universal eschatological scheme. As all normative patterns had during the period been treated as indicative of the underlying order of the whole of Creation and were consequently eagerly sought after, it will come as no surprise that the apparently senseless reality of the inherent instability of earthly power structures may be nevertheless related to a pattern which reinforces the idea of an eschatological progress of history and this is found, in *Morte Arthure*, in the idea of the Nine Worthies.⁹ The greatly popular contemporaneous scheme, which sought to normalise the whole of the medieval historical perspective into a traditionally threefold pattern, superimposes a design of harmony and proportion upon the universal history and consequently links the past, the present and the future into a linear sequence, the ultimate significance of which may be only fully perceived from a vantage point located outside the progression of time. Against this perspective, the sense of individual heroism consists in contributing to the Providential design for the progress of history, which provides the final context for whatever the individual performs in the interest and honour of his household, his kingdom, his overlord or his friends. In this way the Providential role that has been bestowed upon King Arthur is to stand beside Charlemagne and Godfrey of Bouillon to provide the Christian triad of chivalric exemplars to complete the progress of earthly history, which contributes to the fulfilment and ultimate vindication of the Divine scheme for mankind. Thus, although the transitory nature of the individual achievement of Hector, Judas Maccabeus, or King Arthur remains the inescapable consequence of the wound the Creation received in the garden of Eden, the personal valour and heroism still finds its lasting significance and meaning as a minute contribution to the grand eschatological plan. It is then against this context that Arthur's impending tragic fall is to be seen as heroic and his story is a fit matter for a heroic narrative:

⁹ For more on the background see Huizinga 1922: 72.

For-ty Fortune thee fetches to fulfill the number,
Als ninde of the noblest named in erthe;
This shall in romaunce be redde with real knightes,
Reckoned and renownd with riotous kinges,
And deemed on Doomesday for deedes of armes,
For the doughtiest that ever was dwelland in erthe;
So many clerkes and kinges shall carp of your deedes
And keep your conquestes in cronicle for ever.

Morte Arthure, 3438-3445.

The one vital circumstance which becomes apparent on the examination of the two major examples of the medieval heroic narrative which stand, respectively, at the beginning and the end of the progress of the medieval literate culture as it has descended to us, is the continued presence and relevance of the idea of the tradition of the past to the contemporaneous genres within which the heroic mode was expressed. It may be observed here how the momentous ideological shift in the way the idea of the past was conceptualised which medieval culture had undergone in between the composition of *Beowulf* and *Morte Arthure* did nothing to obliterate, or lessen, the strong and intimate link which the medieval heroic literary tradition possessed with the concept of the past, and of history, as a reference point for the immediate narrative and the basic texture of the given work's poetics. Hence the continued presence of the narrative motif where the grandeur of the heroic action is enhanced by the suspension of the dramatic progress of the basic plot and the protagonist may take time to pause and confront the reflection of their present situation against the context of whatever may be gauged compatible with the communal experience of the past.

It will take no particular discernment to relate this narrative motif to a specific scene in *The Lord of the Rings*. Having separated from Faramir, Frodo and Sam follow the path of their desperate quest aimed at the Mount of Doom in the depths of Mordor – a path that will take them presently to the lair of Shelob and the fortress of Cirith Ungol. Taking advantage of a rare moment of respite from the trials and tribulations of the quest, Sam Gamgee diverts his much battered companion with an extended reflection on the role and place of their present quest in the long and tangled history of Middle-earth:

‘Yes, that’s so,’ said Sam. ‘And we shouldn’t be here at all, if we’d known more about it before we started. But I suppose it’s often that way. The brave things in the old tales and songs, Mr. Frodo: adventures, as I used to call them. I used to think that they were things the wonderful folk of the stories went out and looked for, because they wanted them, because they were exciting and life was a bit dull, a kind of a sport, as you might say. But that’s not the way of it with the tales that really mattered, or the ones that stay in the mind. Folk seem to have been just landed in them, usually – their paths were laid that way, as you put it. But I expect they had lots of chances, like us, of turning back, only they didn’t. And if they had, we shouldn’t know, because they’d have been forgotten. We hear about those as just went on – and not all to a good end, mind you; at least not to what folk inside a story and not outside it call a good end.

{...}

Beren now, he never thought he was going to get that Silmaril from the Iron Crown in Thangorodrim, and yet he did, and that was a worse place and a blacker danger than ours. But that’s a long tale, of course, and goes on past the happiness and into grief and beyond it – and the Silmaril went on and came to Eärendil. And why, sir, I never thought of that before! We’ve got – you’ve got some of the light of it in that star-glass that the Lady gave you! Why, to think of it, we’re in the same tale still! It’s going on. Don’t the great tales never end?’

‘No, they never end as tales,’ said Frodo. ‘But the people in them come, and go when their part’s ended. Our part will end later – or sooner.’

Two Towers, 931-32.

The frame of the secondary world in which the story operates extends here in time as well as in space and its most vital purpose is to resurrect and reinterpret the textual and the ideological aura which the sense of contact with the past once conjured up in texts belonging to the heroic literary tradition. The whole idea is here to create a viable frame of reference to arrive at a tangible and intimate sense of a context with the telescoped heritage of a heroic part whereby history rolls back until it loses itself in myth in its ascent towards the core values which provide the meaning and the sense of purpose to the civilisation and culture one is born to be part of. The sense of individual achievement is clearly perceived here as ultimately crystalized beyond individual experience. Its final value will be arrived at in its communal perception, whereby it will be juxtaposed against the

bulk of the received tradition which interprets and conserves historical legacy in the form of conventionalised narratives, the function of which is to abstract the ethical import of the individual exertions of valour with which the heroes of the past seek to measure themselves against the dramatic demands of their historical time.¹⁰

Indeed one of the pivotal functions of the narrative frame of the secondary world is to provide the audience with a universally accessible template of a heroic past whose validity is never compromised in a conflicting multiplicity of divergent, or discontinued, traditions. In this way the model of the secondary world offers an escape from the ideological and ethical entanglements of modern experience within which the multiplicity of approaches towards the idea of historical heritage customarily renders a subjectivized and relativized vision of the past, shorn of the grandeur of an unquestioned heroic achievement which would reverberate across the telescoped perception of history which the record of the present time bequeaths to future generations.

Hence it might be said that, in Tolkien, the secondary world frame is designed to rejuvenate and revitalise the narrative patterns by means of which the myth abstracts core values out of the experience of history. It is then at the level of these core ethical values that the only point of contact is achieved between the ontologically autonomous secondary world and the primary reality within which its audience is submerged. It is the close compatibility of these values which bestows the final justification of validity upon the fictional secondary world narrative, as it constitutes proof of the underlying unified source of all Creation.

In the Tolkienian narrative model, the unquestioned veracity of the unified historical record, helped to a significant degree by the presence of an immortal species whose cultural continuity exceeds anything encountered in the primary reality, serves thus to anchor the individual achievement against the assured reference point provided by the communal experience of the past. The past thus becomes the mirror in which the present may find itself reflected and evaluated

¹⁰ Compare also the complimentary argument in Amendt-Raduege 2018: 113-115.

and the narrative model where the fictional reality is constructed as an autonomous secondary world is but a new mode for the expression of this underlying relationship.

Yet the sense of the past immanent in the fully immersive secondary world model may also become a vehicle for conveying at once the grandeur and the hopelessness of the individual tragedy through recourse to the telescoping presence of the past. It is this sense of echoing doom that lies behind the incarnation of the same narrative motif in George R. R. Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire*. Here we encounter Robb Stark, the doomed King in the North, whose fate it becomes to lead a desperate mutiny of a renegade northern province of the feudal kingdom as it spreads across the continent of Westeros which lies at the heart of Martin's secondary world. As this unexpected role is thrust upon the young nobleman exerting his capabilities beyond his years and experience, Robb Stark begins to enjoy success beyond all expectations before becoming entangled in a calculated game of feudal power politics in the wake of his misjudged, impulsive marriage. In an attempt to regain the loyalty of a notoriously fickle, and unsettlingly powerful, vassal house which has taken offence at his breaking of a marriage agreement, the young king heads for the Frey stronghold of the Twins for the celebrations of the nuptials of his maternal uncle, Lord Edmure Tully, which are meant to appease the proud Lord Walder Frey, the head of the house.

Before Robb Stark dies in a treacherous plot arranged for the occasion by Lord Frey as part of a shrewd and calculated intrigue concocted for political gain, he stops on his way, which takes him through the plains of the Riverlands in the company of his mother, at a weathered tomb containing the remains of a ruler of an ancient kingdom of the race of the First Men, who once inhabited Westeros:

They reached Oldstones after eight more days of steady rain, and made their camp upon the hill overlooking the Blue Fork, within a ruined stronghold of the ancient river kings. Its foundations remained amongst the weeds to show where the walls and keeps had stood, but the local smallfolk had long ago made off with most of the stones to raise their barns and septs and

holdfasts. Yet in the center of what once would have been the castle's yard, a great carved sepulcher still rested, half hidden in waist-high brown grass amongst a stand of ash.

The lid of the sepulcher had been carved into a likeness of the man whose bones lay beneath, but the rain and the wind had done their work. The king had worn a beard, they could see, but otherwise his face was smooth and featureless, with only vague suggestions of a mouth, a nose, eyes, and the crown about the temples. His hands folded over the shaft of a stone warhammer that lay upon his chest. Once the warhammer would have been carved with runes that told its name and history, but all that the centuries had worn away. The stone itself was cracked and crumbling at the comers, discolored here and there by spreading white splotches of lichen, while wild roses crept up over the king's feet almost to his chest.

It was there that Catelyn found Robb, standing somber in the gathering dusk with only Grey Wind beside him. The rain had stopped for once, and he was bareheaded. "Does this castle have a name?" he asked quietly, when she came up to him.

"Oldstones, all the smallfolk called it when I was a girl, but no doubt it had some other name when it was still a hall of kings." She had camped here once with her father, on their way to Seagard. Petyr was with us too...

"There's a song," he remembered. "Jenny of Oldstones, with the flowers in her hair."

"We're all just songs in the end. If we are lucky." She had played at being Jenny that day, had even wound flowers in her hair. And Petyr had pretended to be her Prince of Dragonflies. Catelyn could not have been more than twelve, Petyr just a boy.

"Here lies Tristifer, the Fourth of His Name, King of the Rivers and the Hills." Her father had told her his story once. "He ruled from the Trident to the Neck, thousands of years before Jenny and her prince, in the days when the kingdoms of the First Men were falling one after the other before the onslaught of the Andals. The Hammer of justice, they called him. He fought a hundred battles and won nine-and-ninety, or so the singers say, and when he raised this castle it was the strongest in Westeros." She put a hand on her son's shoulder. "He died in his hundredth battle, when seven Andal kings joined forces against him. The fifth Tristifer was not his equal, and soon the kingdom was lost, and then the castle, and last of all the line. With Tristifer the Fifth died House Mudd, that had ruled the riverlands for a thousand years before the Andals came."

A Storm of Swords, II, 60-61.

Again the moment of the hero's reflection which pits him against the context of history and the past comes against the backdrop of impending doom. But the momentary suspension of the dramatic course of events allows here for no uplifting of spirit by the reassuring touch of the Providential frame of history. The young hero confronts here a vision of the past which seems to convey a message of inherent futility of any noble endeavour with a place in the communal memory being a transient and inessentially inadequate compensation for the yawning gap of personal tragedy which is thrust on some by the currents and turns of history. The story of the forgotten King Tristifer in fact mirrors closely the one of King Robb himself as the death of the King of the North will also spell an end to the attempts of the rebellious province at political emancipation and ushers in a long period of hardship and servitude. This link is further reinforced by the fact that the Starks are the only baronial house in Westeros that descends from the race of the First Men. Thus, in Martin's secondary world, no objective Providential frame saves the grandeur of the heroic endeavours of the past from the processes of gradual decay which are as much a part of the life of various human communities as the erosion of the runes on the tombstone of King Tristifer which render them incomprehensible are an unavoidable circumstance in the operation of the elements of nature. In this context, the prospect of "becoming a song" constitutes a meagre gratification for the tragic fate met in the heroic struggle of life and the suffering incumbent upon it. Within this scheme, the heroes of the past become ultimately crushed by the mechanism akin to the operation of Fortune's merciless Wheel, but they find no place in normative patterns streamlining the historical context into one ideologically unified global order.

Yet, the past is still here the mirror which provides the ultimate context against which the characters' heroic exertions will be pondered on and judged. In this internally focalised text, it becomes the audience's part to be invested with the role of the receptacle for communal memory and thus it is still against the context of the late King Tristifer the Fourth that Robb Stark's own tragic end will be construed. The sense of the past is here encoded in the repetitiveness of historical tragedy and in this it seems to echo the desperate thoughts of Shakespeare's Richard II, uttered in his final soliloquy:

Thoughts tending to content flatter themselves
That they are not the first of fortune's slaves,
Nor shall not be the last; like silly beggars
Who sitting in the stocks refuge their shame,
That many have and others must sit there;
And in this thought they find a kind of ease,
Bearing their own misfortunes on the back
Of such as have before endured the like.

(*Richard II*, V,5, ll. 22-30).

Thus the consolation of the past is here not found in the reiteration of the enduring dimension of history, but, conversely, by linking the repeated examples of the existential tragedy of individual lives into a pattern emerging through the audience's ability to evoke a sense of solemn grandeur from the brittleness of all human endeavour.

Yet the existential pathos which Robb Stark finds at the grave of King Tristifer is also rooted in the medieval sense of heroic tragedy and, although it is not essentially compatible with what we find in Tolkien, it also derives ultimately from the tradition exemplified by Beowulf and King Arthur.

Thus, irrespective of what individual vision defined the aesthetic and ethical outlook of a particular author or period, it may be seen that the consciousness of the interaction between the present and the past has constituted one of the most essential, abiding constituent elements of literary composition in the genres which made use of the heroic mode, and it is in this vital aspect that the organic link between the modern genre of high fantasy and its medieval antecedents manifests itself most strongly. The aim of the following argument shall be to trace the various aspects in which the medieval literary and cultural legacy has been reinterpreted and reinvigorated in the two most outstanding examples of modern high fantasy.

Chapter I

The Tradition of the Heroic Myth

I. Medieval Context: The Medieval Idea of the Myth

The modern genre of fantasy has enjoyed continuous and exuberant growth over the last century. As a predictable and welcome outcome of this process, the boundaries of the genre have undergone constant redefinition, as fantasy comes into contact with other literary genres, styles and traditions, cultural modes of expression or aesthetic decorum. It is no wonder, then, that the most incisive critical studies seeking to provide a valid and workable model for the mercurial genre commence with an attempt at normalising the many incarnations of what is collectively conceived of as constituting the multifarious tradition of fantasy literature. Thus, for instance, Ann Swinfen in her seminal 1984 study *In Defence of Fantasy* seeks to organise the models of secondary world creation into a threefold division. She makes a distinction between animal fantasy, where only selected elements of primary reality function beyond the limits of formal realism; dual fantasy, founded upon a dichotomy between coexisting fictional worlds, one of which makes recourse to fantasy imagery and conventions; and lastly, a full submersion fantastic secondary world, where all elements constituting the fictional reality operate within the fantastic mode.

Subsequently, Farah Mendlesohn, in her 2008 normative study *Rhetorics of Fantasy*, proposes a four-category model: portal-quest fantasy, whereby the unfamiliar surroundings of the fantasy setting

are channelled through the perception of a protagonist positioned in between the “unknown” new world (1) and the audience’s familiar experience; immersive fantasy, taking place in an alternative “complete world” (59); intrusion fantasy, where the familiar reality is “ruptured” by an intrusion from the fantasy world (115); and, finally, liminal fantasy, where the sense of inherent validity of the fantastic imagery is undermined by the introduction of a interpretative distance between the protagonist and the audience (184-185).

More recently, Mark J. P. Wolf, in his renowned 2012 publication *Building Imaginary Worlds*, proposes a four-level arrangement of the nominal, cultural, natural and ontological realms which are designed to mark the degree to which literary secondary worlds become saturated with fantastic elements as they progressively depart from the consensual realism of the primary world.

What lies behind these divergent models designed to normalise the various types of secondary worlds which can be found in modern fantasy literature is the assumption that the key to their categorisation and definition will be found in the degree to which the constituent elements of their imagery become distinctly separated from their direct, or indirect, conceptual counterparts in the primary reality.

It would indeed be futile to question the indubitable validity of such an approach. Yet it seems important to argue here for the introduction of an additional nuance into similar normative models by considering not solely those elements of the secondary world which constitute the textual presence of the narrative, but also those which create the sense of the past which extends beyond the immediate plot of the narrative and which frequently provide the overriding cultural context for the story which is there unveiled. To develop this sort of sensitivity is especially important for those literary texts which belong to the subgenre of the high, or heroic fantasy, because they rest on the shoulders of the literary tradition where the ultimate value and significance of the narrative cannot be made sense of except in relation to the heroic past conceived of as having been acted out in a mythical reality distinct from the historical time in which the action of the narrative takes place.

Admittedly Wolf’s model allows much room for the consideration of some aspects of such mythical reality within his cultural realm

where much of the communal significance of the notion of the heroic past would be made apparent. However, we must realise that heroic fantasy builds its model of mythical reality upon literary and cultural traditions which derive from epochs where the perception of reality was markedly different from contemporary standards and customs. Consequently, we shall find that the interaction between the reality of the heroic mythical past and the narrative present will cut athwart Wolf's cultural and ontological levels as it will now be the cultural reference stemming from the communal acceptance of the underlying validity of the myth that will provide the rationale for the functioning of the basic ontological phenomena, rather than the conceptual framework based on the empirical concept of physical laws which does not have any cultural validity before the seventeenth century.

Consequently, in fantasy narratives which draw upon the literary tradition of heroic literary genres, the mythical past will constitute a distinct and autonomous level of the fictional secondary world. Its significance lies in the fact that the ultimate meaning and context for the present narrative action may only be found through reference to the mythical past. Indeed, this feature of literary narratives functioning within the romance mode was recognised long before modern heroic fantasy flourished in its present form. In his *Anatomy of Criticism*, while talking about the legacy of the chivalric romance, Northrop Frye stresses the "romantic [...] tendency to suggest implicit mythical patterns in a world more closely associated with human experience" (139) and argues for the presence of "the perennially childlike quality" of "its extraordinarily persistent nostalgia, its search for some kind of imaginative golden age in time and in space" (186). Indeed, Frye's explanation of the inherent relation between the myth and the romance remains as valid as ever:

Myth, then, is one extreme of literary design; naturalism is the other, and in between lies the whole area of romance, using that term to mean (...) the tendency (...) to displace myth in the human direction and yet, in contrast to "realism", to conventionalise content in an idealised direction. (136-137)

We must next go beyond Frye's avowed ahistoricism of perspective and proceed to a more incisive consideration of the role the heroic

myth plays in the consciousness of the kind of traditional societies which have bequeathed to us the literary genres of the epic and the chivalric romance from the legacy of which the dominant mode of artistic expression in the genre of high fantasy has crystallised.

The function and role which the heroic myth plays in the life and tradition of any human society has always been recognised as one of the central issues in studies of the cultures of all communities in all historical periods. These kind of studies have also continually overlapped with analysis of the literary heritage of any given community as the myth invariably becomes interwoven into the fabric of their literary tradition, determining both the underlying motifs of the traditional – oral, or else orally derived narratives embedded in the cultural heritage of a particular society – and the intertextual frame of reference for the newly emerging literate works where the underlying patterns find new articulation, and sometimes in their turn become sources of new mythical archetypes.

The key to the understanding of the concept of myth is to make sense of it in relation to a wider concept – that of cultural memory. Cultural memory, as defined in the classic theory of Maurice Halbwachs, is a conceptual construct by means of which a given community will establish its sense of identity as a social group in relation to a common past (J. Assmann 2015: 51-56; J. Assmann 2008: 110-112; A. Assmann 2013: 54-57, 127-132; Connerton 1989: 36-40). Within this approach, any individual memory, which is one of the fundamental elements which determine the individual's sense of personal and social identity, is itself a mental conception which emerges through contact with members of the person's native community. Consequently, it is the community's idea of the common past which is the decisive circumstance in the forging of individual memory of any member of the community. The function of cultural memory is thus essentially to foster and stimulate the group's collective experience of facing its own identity in the context of its historical legacy and of projecting its own image into the consensual vision of the past.

In evolving its own distinct cultural memory the social group develops a way to anchor its own sense of identity against its communal sense of the past. This sense of the past is distinct from any objective, retrievable data stored in historical records and accessed

for the purpose of historical studies. Typically, cultural memory ends at the point where the period of verifiable historical record begins, since both the nature and the objectives of both modes of conceptualising the past are inherently indifferent. Cultural memory reaches for the mythical mode. It takes as its beginning the farthest point in time which may be defined by the community with reference to a tangible set of reference points which are abstracted out of a potential historical context and acquire a more permanent symbolic connotation (Assmann 2015: 58-61, 79-81). The historical fact is typically an element defining a segment of concretised narrative tracing a process of continuous change. By being abstracted out of this context, the symbolic element becomes fixed in a narrative pattern whose primary function is to rise above the consciousness of historical change and become an element in fostering the consciousness of continuity, of underscoring the constant change inherent in the historical process with a sense of permanence through which the social group's mirror image of its unique identity is traceable to an original source which provides it with a sense of stability and purpose. Thus the community forges its foundational memory which attaches the community's underlying values and identity to a mythical moment of the beginning of time which is the source of its renewable vitality and continued social cohesion (Assmann 2015: 68). In other words, cultural memory transforms history into myth in order to preserve its symbolic significance which transcends the original historical context of the events which may have given rise to the mythical story, now functioning *in illo tempore*, i.e. being positioned at a higher extra-temporal level where the accumulated meaning of the past illuminates and vindicates the present.

Thus cultural memory retains a vision of the foundational past which is encoded in the form of a mythical narrative (Assmann 2015: 90-94). This mode of conserving the past is distinctly different from the mode of communicating values and patterns of behaviour through reference to a system of abstract ideas; however, it is just as separate from the historical narrative which seeks to project a given account of a specific sequence of events of which the ultimate import is tied to the specific context of the past. In fact, it may be said that it unites both approaches by conveying potentially abstract values as

a story where the values are made into a specific, tangible symbolic sign, but elevated above any specifically historic signification. Consequently, it is by its continued relevance to the present that the myth which is the subject of cultural memory acquires its sacred status as a conveyor of the community's fundamental values and identity traits. The continued relevance of these values will serve, in turn, as proof of their extra-natural origin and validity. As M. Eliade puts it in his seminal *Myth of the Eternal Return*: "the world which surrounds us, civilised by the hand of man, is accorded no validity beyond that which is due to the extraterrestrial prototype that served as its model" (Eliade 1959: 10). In fact, it is the concretised form of the mythical symbolism that allows for the incarnation of the spiritual values in the material reality: "Humility is only a virtue; but humility practiced after the Saviour's example is a religious act and a means of salvation" (Eliade 1959: 23).

The myth is thus a story retold to find continued transcendental order in the experiences of the present and the scattered memories of history. Its function is to provide a sense of order in the present-day reality and to legitimise a community's place in it by means of the process of a semiotisation of the past.

This conventionalised, homeostatic character of mythical narratives patterns makes them potentially renewable whenever a new momentous set of events transforms and redefines the cultural identity of the social group which traces its identity to a particular mythical pattern. Typically, in such a case new historical data is substituted within the narrative structure of the mythical story in order to ensure its periodic rejuvenation and continued relevance to the community. This mechanism is most apparent in the case of societies functioning in the state of primary orality; it has been extensively discussed in the studies of Walter Ong (Ong 1982: 56-68).

In traditional oral cultures which have defined the character of humanity's social life for most of its existence, the mythical narrative is the only accessible way in which a given community may access the knowledge of the past which extends anywhere beyond the immediate experience of the individual's closest communicative circle, which J. Assmann calls *communicative memory* (Assman 2015: 66). The vision of the past which it projects remains essentially compatible

with the mythical perspective, and it becomes the crucial element in building up the hope of a future return of the conditions enshrined in the hallowed past of the heroic epoch.

Thus the figures of memory which are the subject of the community's mental vision of the past may only contain information which bears relevance to the community's present situation, and all context which would be central to the period-specific signification such information would have in the context of the study of history becomes progressively obliterated. The mythical story becomes abstracted out of the specific historical context to become the basis for the ritual which ascertains and renews the continued relevance of the values and notions of communal identity in the community's present-day life. The ritual is thus the final and inevitable consequence of the existence of the group's cultural memory. Its function is to bring myth into contact with the ordinary reality of the present time, to ensure a periodic renewal of the community's link with its past. The continued performance of the rites and rituals which embody and reiterate the mythical narrative is thus an essential practice of institutionalised mnemotechniques designed to ensure the community's prolonged vitality through upholding the continued relevance of the myth in the present-day reality (Assmann 2015: 72-73; 112-114; 157-158; Connerton 1989: 53-61). Alternatively, as M. Eliade puts it, they constitute "the revivification, the reactualisation, of a primordial heroic myth" (Eliade 1959: 37). The periodic invocation and reiteration of the mythical past in a communal ritual is obviously most typical of traditional oral societies where provides the only way of participating in the past; however, it has to be remembered that it has never lost its importance as a vehicle for the transmission of cultural memory and it remains an element of social life in modern communities where the mythical mode is frequently invoked in communal interpretation of history (Havelock 1986: 63-78).

Throughout their evolution societies needed to select individuals whose social role was to conserve the accumulated knowledge of the mythical past and convey it to fellow members of the community (Assmann 2015: 69, 285). At some stage of the long evolution of traditional oral societies, the role of the receptacle and transmitter of narratives which encode the underlying figures of cultural memory

passed on from the spiritual leader of the community to the oral poet, and the primordial ritual split into religious ceremony and oral performance of heroic verse (Havelock 19865: 76-78). Thus the original oral tradition of heroic epic poetry emerged in traditional aristocratic feudal societies as the primary carrier of cultural memory and served, throughout its history, as the key element of preserving, transiting and justifying the ontological core of chivalric ethos of the feudal nobility (Assmann 2015: 285).

As the Middle Ages witnessed major social transformations which took European societies from the position of essentially primary orality to the threshold of predominantly literate societies, so the precise role and character of the heroic tradition in conserving and fostering the cultural memory of societies and communities underwent a process of massive transformation and redefinition. One key circumstance conditioning this evolution was the transformation of the identities of Europe's social groups from loose associations functioning alongside tribal or ethnic lines and based predominantly upon tight feudal structures which reflected traditional relationships of seniority based on genealogy into more formally complex societies whereby the declining feudal structures started to embrace the emergent notion of the nation state. The other fundamental element was the overriding impact of the gradual introduction of Christian culture which superimposed a new universal template of the mythical past which provided the ultimate point of reference determining both the cultural identity of multi-ethnic social and intellectual elites of the continent and the common consciousness of its global population on former traditions of social communities.

Against this context, the medieval period will appear to us as the last bastion of traditional forms of transmission of cultural memory which has since been substantially eroded by the ascent of literate culture and the further separation and fragmentation of traditional channels of social communication which was the inevitable result of the growing complexity of social interactions and the dissipation of Europe's unity of cultural and spiritual life. Undoubtedly, the gradual introduction of Christian ethics and their new global historical perspective transformed the heroic ethos of traditional feudal societies to a decisive degree and it profoundly affected cultural

memories of Europe's societies. This process is inseparably linked with the ability to read and write becoming more widespread, which was a major driver of the dissipation of the new religion; it also stimulated the emergence of a new perspective on the idea of authority about the past and its sources and transmitters.

Yet advancing literacy did not transform the oral mentality of European societies overnight; for centuries to come, European culture was characterised and determined by persisting habits of mind which originated in the context of oral culture. As M. Amodio writes:

Throughout the medieval period, the vast majority of the population did not have access to the technology of literacy and so lived in what was a predominantly oral world, one in which orality and its attendant habits of mind not only played an important role in daily life but also exerted a powerful influence over the articulation of vernacular verse.

(Amodio 2004: xv).

As the same time, the social perception of the authority of "the book" became one of the dominant and recognisable traits of the medieval period, and it effectively laid the foundations for modern, literate sensibility of subsequent epochs. Thus, as C.S. Lewis comments on "the overwhelmingly bookish or clerkly character of medieval culture":

If their culture is regarded as a response to environment, then the elements in that environment to which it responded most vigorously were manuscripts. Every writer, if he possibly can, bases himself on an earlier writer, follows an auctour: preferably a Latin one. This is one of the things that differentiate the period almost equally from savagery and from our modern civilisation. In a savage community you absorb your culture, in part unconsciously, from participation in the immemorial pattern of behaviour, and in part by word of mouth, from the old men of the tribe. In our own society most knowledge depends, in the last resort, on observation. But the Middle Ages depended predominantly on books. Though literacy was of course far rarer than now, reading was in one way a more important ingredient of the total culture.

(Lewis 1964: 5).

Although the authority of "the book" was routinely invoked in the transmission of narratives which contributed to the definition

a social group's cultural identity, the idea of a fixed and finite literate text which served as a record of the past, or else a definite statement upon it, was not known to the epoch. Instead, individual texts seemed to have been perceived as transmitters of successive stages in the process of conveying, accumulating and augmenting narratives about the mythical past which were gradually amplified and redefined to ensure the stories' continuing vitality and relevance for a given community (Amodio 2004: 12-15; Witalisz 2011:13-35). Thus, the medieval understanding of the past reiterates, at its core, the mythical consciousness of traditional societies. As M. Carruthers writes:

Amplifying is an emotional, image-making activity (...), and it is just this quality that makes it ethically profitable (...) Composition starts in memorised reading. The commonest way for a medieval author to depict himself is as a reader of an old book or a listener to an old story, which he is recalling by retelling. (Carruthers 1992: 191)

Consequently, medieval perception of the past is determined by the tendency to understand it in a telescopic relation to the present, whereby its relevance would be ultimately perceived not as a function of anything resembling modern notions of verifiable historical accuracy, but in relation to patterns of verisimilitude which abstract traditional ethically accepted models of human character and behaviour. This form of perception invests the literate conception of history with mythical patterns typical of oral culture, whereby the vitality of the past is viewed in relation to the degree to which it may be synthesised into recurrent patterns of individual behaviour which reinforce the present ethical and existential consensus. In consequence, literary modes of preserving and disseminating historical data continue serving cognitive habits and attitudes characteristic of oral culture.

As Ruth Morse comments further:

Admixtures of invention, elaboration, and embellishment were a method of stylisation in order to make the past comprehensible. (Morse 1991: 87)

Although within medieval Christian culture ideas about the mythical past were coming into contact and merging with, and were sometimes expressed as, normative schemes which sought to arrange

the historical record in forms which would elucidate and express history's ultimate eschatological context, the result was a mythicization of history rather than historicization of myth. This was because normative constructs such as the periodisation of history into the Six Ages of the World (or *Septem Aetates Mundi*) proposed by St. Augustine, the three-fold division of history into the ages before the Mosaic Law, under the Law and the Age of Grace under Christ, or the corresponding historiographic schemes such as that of the Nine Worthies, effectively placed the abstracted, generalised meaning drawn from the historical record at the feet of the Christian Myth, by virtue of which all history received its ultimate significance. Consequently, to abstract a sense of mythical permanence out of the progress of history remained the ultimate aim of philosophers of history throughout the medieval period. Thus M. Carruthers proposes the term *memorative composition* (194) to account for the distinctive quality of medieval attitudes determining the specificity of the mentality existing at the nexus between oral and literate cultural environments. As M. Carruthers explains:

This "omnitemporality" in medieval thought (...) is usually attributed to a prevailing belief in the eternity of God and consequent emphasis upon divine continuity in human history"; (...)

The book "supports" memoria because it serves its requirements, some of which were biological, but many of which, in the memorial cultures of the Middle Ages, were institutional and thus conventional, social and ethical." (Carruthers 1992: 191-194)

Thus the advent of Christianity profoundly transformed the mythical way of thinking about the past, as well as revitalising it by bringing it into contact with universalised patterns of globalised historiography. Consequently, medieval forms of preserving and disseminating cultural memory persisted in their mythical character throughout the period and they determined the cultural environment and literary practice behind contemporaneous forms of the epic and the chivalric romance. The art and practice of heroic poetry succumbed only gradually to the necessities of literate culture, and for centuries it exhibited signs of oral formulaic composition in

written texts transmitted in ways typical of literate culture. These literate texts would, in turn, be presented to their audiences in forms which mimicked oral performance. It is its conservative character that ultimately helped to preserve the continued relevance of the idea of the literary myth. Indeed, the awareness of the existence of a mythical layer of history which provides the ultimate point of reference for the exploits and tribulations of characters involved in the progress of the narrative remained one of the determining features of medieval heroic literature. It was also one of the most important elements which guarded its distinctiveness from the new tradition of the realist novel, where the concept of the past was founded on the principles of empirical historiography which, in turn, helped to reinforce the idea of realism in a narrative. With the re-emergence of the heroic mode of composition in the modern-day genre of high fantasy, the concept of the mythical past has once again been revitalised in literary culture; however, its new context, resulting from the modern application of the concept of the secondary world, has invested the notion of the literary myth with a distinctly new function and meaning.

The purpose of our argument will now be to transpose some of the complexity surrounding the topic of social perception of the mythical narrative onto the study of two of the most notable secondary worlds in modern fantasy, created by J. R. R. Tolkien and George R. R. Martin. The scope of the constituent narratives and the sense of historical depth achieved in their creation allows for the emergence of an autonomous mythical level, embedded in the structure of the main narrative in a way which recalls and reinterprets many of the intricacies present in the relationship between such corresponding levels in the primary world. Both Tolkien's and Martin's secondary worlds feature a significant number of stories and motifs widely recognised across various communities as carrying a deeper cultural significance or conveying a vital ethical perspective reveals their mythical character.

For the purposes of the present argument, however, we shall concentrate on two distinctive myths which not only share a significant number of corresponding motifs and structural elements, which makes them useful for comparison, but also appear to be positioned on the same mythical level as the basic textual reality of the two

corresponding fictional secondary worlds, displaying interesting differences in terms of their interrelation with the events of the main plot and their perception by the characters of the narrative.

A comparison of this kind allows us to trace the respective ways in which the two central narratives – *The Lord of The Rings* and *The Song of Ice and Fire* – seek to reproduce the effect of the mythical plane of reference originating from medieval heroic traditions. This interrelation of the reality of the mythical past with the immediate narrative progress of the plot unveiling in the two texts which expresses the ultimate significance of the characters' motivation and actions; consequently, the degree to which the respective narratives succeed in realising the full potential of the heroic literary tradition is determined by the organic nature of the relationship between the two levels.

This determines the central role of these particular mythical stories for the two respective secondary worlds, and it is in this context that we shall proceed to compare the heroic myths of Elendil and Nyméria.

The character of Elendil (3119-3441 S.A.), a descendant of the ancient human race of the Dúnedain, is inextricably connected with the fall of the civilisation of Númenor, which marks the end of the Second Age in the history of Arda. Born and raised during the twilight years of the human kingdom, as it slides into social decline and corresponding moral decay, Elendil is destined to become the central figure amid the last remaining handful of Númenoreans still upholding friendship with the Valar and Eldar residing in the immortal lands of Valinor. This relationship once lay at the very foundation of the existence and prosperity of the Númenorean civilisation, but it has since been maligned and abandoned because of Sauron's malicious counsel. When the last king of Númenor – the decadent Ar-Pharazôn – provokes a desperate war with Valinor with the hope of gaining extra longevity by conquering the immortal lands, Elendil uses his maritime skill and expertise and flees the forsaken island kingdom with his two sons, Isildur and Anárion, to land on the shores of Middle-earth thus laying the foundations for the most important human settlements on this continent during the Third Age. Elendil himself lands in the country of Lindon which will become

his permanent abode as he develops a friendship with the elven ruler Gil-galad. Elendil's sons, in their turn, go on to found the two principal kingdoms of Men in Middle-earth, i.e. Arnor and Gondor. When the kingdoms are attacked by Sauron in the year 3428 of the Second Age, Elendil rides forth to battle at the side of Gil-galad. Both leaders are slain in battle and Elendil's fabled sword Narsil famously breaks beneath him. When Isildur uses his father's sword to cut the One Ring from the hand of Sauron, making the dark lord surrender the field and flee in his disembodied spirit, he in effect lays the foundations for the memorable events taking place three thousand years later, in the year 3018 of the Third Age, with which the plot of *The Lord of the Rings* is most immediately concerned.¹

In the case of Nymeria, the historical distance separating the mythical character from George R. R. Martin's main narrative is relatively smaller, being around a thousand years. In terms of geographical location, we proceed in the opposite direction – instead of moving from west towards Middle-earth, we head from the east towards Westeros.

Starting on the continent of Essos we encounter princess Nymeria of Ny Sar as head of one of the principal baronial houses of the Rhoynar, a numerous people living in central-western Essos whose development puts them in conflict with the expanding outpost of the Valyrian empire. This rivalry results in decades of local conflict until the Rhoynar are led by Prince Garin to wage a full-scale war with Valyria in around 700 BC; the Rhoynar are annihilated by dragons – the weapon of choice of the Valyrian nobility.

Princess Nymeria, whose lands are located further up river, escapes the universal destruction, and she somewhat unexpectedly finds herself as the sole remaining leader of her people. Nymeria leads a fleet of “ten thousand ships” made up of the Roynish survivors on an arduous journey through the Summer Seas, before turning to Westeros in search of lands fit to establish a new home.

After landing in Dorne, she marries Mors Martell, heir of one of the major southern baronial houses, and over the coming years Nymeria's military prowess and leadership skills become instrumental

¹ For the story of Elendil's life we follow *The Silmarillion*, 351-282.

in establishing the Martells as the unquestioned rulers of Dorne. As widespread intermarriage between Roynar and the native Dornish follows, the newcomers become an integral part of the local population.²

It is perhaps a credit to the enduring vitality of the mythical narratives to be found in the primary world that, whatever the scope and grandeur of the secondary heroic realities, most of them will inevitably reach for familiar primary world narrative components and structures to create the fabric of secondary mythical realities. The stories of Elendil and Nymeria include many familiar elements, perhaps most obviously and importantly reaching for *The Aeneid*. Both main characters are aristocratic escapees from mayor political/historical cataclysms which destroy their homelands; both manage to escape the doom of their native land and undertake perilous sea voyages to lead their people to establish new settlements, new political entities and new civilisations. Secondly, both stories function in the context of the myth of Atlantis, as both Númenor and Valyria are obviously direct derivatives of this particular topos.

In the case of Nymeria, the direct link with the character of Aeneas is especially strong, with notable references to *The Odyssey*. Additionally, since “ten thousand ships” become a visible stock attribute of the warrior princess, Nymeria also shares some of the mystique of Helen of Troy.

These days, the phrase is most commonly associated with Christopher Marlowe’s famous lines in his *Doctor Faustus*:

Was this the face that launch’d a thousand ships,
And burnt the topless towers of Ilium?—
Ch. Marlowe *Dr. Faustus*, ll. 243-244,

It is important to remember that the phrase can be found in a formulaic character in medieval romance literature:

Yt is wel wist how that the Grekes strong
In armes with a thousand shippes wente
Geoffrey Chaucer, *Troilus and Cryseyde*, Book 1, 57- 58

² For the account of Nymeria’s life we follow *The World of Ice and Fire*, 21-25.

The nowmber of the noble shippes, þat to þe note yode,
 ffor to telle hom by tale, was truly a thowsaund
 Twa hundrethe & twenty, & twelue o þe last,

Gest Historiale of the Destruction of Troy, Book 9, 4133- 4135.

Another important factor for Nymeria is that the story of the conflict between the Roynar and Valyria follows the destruction of the Celtic civilisation in western and central Europe by the Roman Empire; Prince Garin's direct historical counterpart is the noble but doomed Celtic king Vercingetorix, whose defeat at the hands of Julius Caesar spelled the end of the Celtic civilisation in Gaul.

Finally, there is also a notable link between Nymeria and Tolkien's own warrior Princess Haleth of the First Age. She is the valiant leader of the Haladin tribe: their desperate battle with the Orc raiders leaves them similarly outnumbered and overwhelmed by a superior enemy, and in consequence nearly destroyed and deprived of leadership. The character of Haleth is in fact a very close counterpart for Nymeria – another noblewoman, who, in the wake of a war which nearly destroys her people and deprives them of the “natural” male leadership, takes upon herself the task of gathering her followers and leading them on a long and perilous journey in search of a new and safe home.

The two stories share many motifs, such as the contrast between the desperate heroism of Haleth's brother Haldar who dies as he rushes to save his father in battle and Haleth's capacity for stubborn endurance against the odds in the wake of the subsequent defeat and the prospect of the annihilation of her entire nation.

Martin's mythical construction is arrived at through a more overtly intertextual recombination of primary world sources and influences. Nevertheless, as both mythical stories are submerged in and enveloped by the autonomous secondary worlds of the main narratives, such differences will be rendered relatively less important as their mythical function becomes transformed. It may be said that the function of these stories is generally twofold since they are intended to have a different impact on the narrative's primary world audience and on the characters of the basic narratives; in textual terms, the latter are meant to imaginatively augment be subordinate to this context.

Thus, for primary world readers, the mythology surrounding the basic heroic narrative which develops within an autonomous secondary world lends credibility to the imagery created within the narrative; in other words it serves as a secondary counterpart to a universally recognised primary world phenomenon which is relevant to the heroic element since any protagonist of a traditional heroic narrative interact mentally with the sphere of myth as it provides at least part of the rationale for their actions. Because a “full immersion” secondary world narrative is not supposed to be directly dependent on the primary reality for any part of its imagery, this level has to be constructed anew within the fictional world, although, as noted previously, it is ultimately made of elements which are traceable to their primary world’s counterparts.

For the characters of the basic secondary world narrative, the function of these “artificial” myths is different and it is made to mirror the reaction of the primary world audience to the primary world’s mythical stories. The attitudes and reactions of individual characters to such mythical stories serve as a psychological presentation of the characters and their ideological and ethical stance; consequently, it provides a further rationale for their decisions and actions. The combination of such textual attitudes reveals more general tendencies of behaviour and thought which lead to a particular secondary world a sense of uniqueness and of the estranging otherness which is part of the reason for creating autonomous literary worlds in the first place.

II. The Heroic Myth in J. R. R. Tolkien: Elendil

We first examine the way the myth of Elendil operates in the secondary world of *The Lord of the Rings*. The nature of the myth of Elendil in Tolkien’s universe can be defined by referring to two principal features: its monolithic character, and gradually unveiling dynamic quality. Although the story of Elendil does not have a written textual source as its basis, it is nevertheless present in one undisputed version and neither the story nor its import is ever questioned or challenged, and no divergent or rival versions are in circulation at any stage, nor is it ever misappropriated or rendered imperfectly.

Likewise it is never parodied, bowdlerised and never seems to enter the lower, popular residue.

This is largely due to the fact that the Elves' longevity protects their communal memory from the natural processes of corruption and transformation which affect the cultural memory of mortal species based on orally transmitted myths. Additionally, in Tolkien's secondary universe the cultural continuity is, for all the dramatic upheavals which the various species undergo, greater than anything ever experienced in this respect in the primary reality.

The myth of Elendil has thus a clearly defined message and value, it is objective and pertains, in terms of self-identification, primarily to Aragorn as the descendant and heir of Elendil. As the narrative progresses, we see the myth gradually emerging from the historical past gaining ever greater relevance to the present concerns of the characters. Therefore the myth first appears in the veil of the distant past, as Gandalf explains the rudiments of the history of Gondor to Frodo:

But for the moment, since most of all you need to know how this thing came to you, and that will be tale enough, this is all that I will say. It was Gil-galad, Elven-king and Elendil of Westemnesse who overthrew Sauron, though they themselves perished in the deed; and Isildur Elendil's son cut the Ring from Sauron's hand and took it for his own. Then Sauron was vanquished and his spirit fled and was hidden for long years, until his shadow took shape again in Mirkwood.

The Fellowship of the Ring, 68.

The wording of Gandalf's comment seems significant as it, for the moment, embeds the story of Elendil emphatically in the past. It furthermore emerges that, although the story is common knowledge among Middle-earth's intellectual elite, even the wizard initially needs to improve his understanding of the details of the story:

Gandalf looked at Frodo, and his eyes glinted. 'I knew much and I have learned much,' he answered. 'But I am not going to give an account of all my doings to you. The history of Elendil and Isildur and the One Ring is known to all the Wise.

The Fellowship of the Ring, 74.

The growth of the myth in J. R. R. Tolkien is a gradual progress of the past towards the present moment: the myth comes close to the present in its re-enactment at times of special historical importance. In other words, one enters the myth as self-defence at a time of need. The myth is dynamic; it unveils in reality and merges into it at times of greater importance. This dynamic quality is thus the direct result of the fact that the myth of Elendil begins with what J. Assmann calls the counter-representative position with respect to the immediate fictional reality of the secondary world. Its first functions within the vision of the glorious heroic past, which compensates for the sense of decline and the mounting threat of the resurgence of evil (Assmann 2015: 94).

The myth of Elendil first appears embedded in the landscape, also seemingly waiting to be recognised and acknowledged by the characters steeped in the dramatic present of the narrative:

This path was made to serve the forts along the walls. But long before, in the first days of the North Kingdom, they built a great watch-tower on Weathertop, Amon Sûl they called it. It was burned and broken, and nothing remains of it now but a tumbled ring, like a rough crown on the old hill's head. Yet once it was tall and fair. It is told that Elendil stood there watching for the coming of Gil-galad out of the West, in the days of the Last Alliance.'

The Fellowship of the Ring, 242.

It is also clear from a very early stage that the myth is also more oral: it comes alive in utterance, through language; it is communal property. It is oral transmission that makes the recovery of the myth possible, therefore it may be subject to standard taboo regulations, as becomes clear from Aragorn's conversation with Frodo:

'I know only the little that Gandalf has told me,' said Frodo slowly. 'Gil-galad was the last of the great Elf-kings of Middle-earth. Gil-galad is Starlight in their tongue. With Elendil, the Elf-friend, he went to the land of——' 'No!' said Strider interrupting, 'I do not think that tale should be told now with the servants of the Enemy at hand. If we win through to the house of Elrond, you may hear it there, told in full.'

The Fellowship of the Ring, 250.

This feature is important inasmuch as the mythical story's connection with the magical principles makes it be positioned closer to the spiritual layer of reality in accordance with the logic of the classic concept of the secondary world.

As the myth of Elendil is gradually unveiled, we see how the council held at the court of Elrond in Rivendell marks the stage when the mythical story and the present reality of the narrative come closer together:

Of Númenor he spoke, its glory and its fall, and the return of the Kings of Men to Middle-earth out of the deeps of the Sea, borne upon the wings of storm. Then Elendil the Tall and his mighty sons, Isildur and Anárion, became great lords; and the North-realm they made in Arnor, and the South realm in Gondor above the mouths of Anduin. But Sauron of Mordor assailed them, and they made the Last Alliance of Elves and Men, and the hosts of Gil-galad and Elendil were mustered in Arnor.

(...)

'I was the herald of Gil-galad and marched with his host. I was at the Battle of Dagorlad before the Black Gate of Mordor, where we had the mastery: for the Spear of Gil-galad and the Sword of Elendil, Aiglos and Narsil, none could withstand. I beheld the last combat on the slopes of Orodruin, where Gil-galad died, and Elendil fell, and Narsil broke beneath him; but Sauron himself was overthrown, and Isildur cut the Ring from his hand with the hilt-shard of his father's sword, and took it for his own.'

The Fellowship of the Ring, 316-317.

The past and the present come closer together here not only because we encounter a living witness of the momentous events for the first time. As the present threat facing the characters becomes truly epic, they are almost transported to the distant past when the story has its roots and where one finds epic figures whose example suddenly gains in relevance as the present danger becomes ever closer. It is thus not only that the myth descends upon the present reality, but the ever increasing need for taking the a heroic stance transports the present reality closer to the times of the mythical past. However, the process of connecting the two is still extensive and gradual, for the past glory of the past seems irrevocably lost for now:

From the ruin of the Gladden Fields, where Isildur perished, three men only came ever back over the mountains after long wandering. One of these was Ohtar, the esquire of Isildur, who bore the shards of the sword of Elendil; and he brought them to Valandil, the heir of Isildur, who being but a child had remained here in Rivendell. But Narsil was broken and its light extinguished, and it has not yet been forged again. (...)

Many Elves and many mighty Men, and many of their friends, had perished in the war. Anárion was slain, and Isildur was slain; and Gil-galad and Elendil were no more. Never again shall there be any such league of Elves and Men;

The Fellowship of the Ring, 317-318.

In this sense, the entire council in Rivendell is an exercise in invoking the heroic spirit incarnate in the figure of Elendil from the distant past into the perilous present. In other words, the procedure is a regular oral ritual: the order of the sitting and the speeches are reminiscences of the stages of an oral ritualistic proceedings. First we witness a ceremonial presentation of the heroic deeds of the past, followed by a ceremonial statement outlining the next stage delivered by Aragorn who, as descendant of Elendil, pronounces the formal exhortation:

‘But doom and great deeds are indeed at hand. For the Sword that was Broken is the Sword of Elendil that broke beneath him when he fell. It has been treasured by his heirs when all other heirlooms were lost; for it was spoken of old among us that it should be made again when the Ring, Isildur’s Bane, was found. Now you have seen the sword that you have sought, what would you ask? Do you wish for the House of Elendil to return to the Land of Gondor?’

The Fellowship of the Ring, 322.

Then it falls to Boromir to ceremonially invoke the need for the return of that heroic spirit, which, in ritualistic terms, completes the ceremony:

‘Yet we are hard pressed, and the Sword of Elendil would be a help beyond our hope – if such a thing could indeed return out of the shadows of the past.’ He looked again at Aragorn, and doubt was in his eyes.

The Fellowship of the Ring, 322.

Thus, if doubts were to persist over Aragorn's ability to follow in the footsteps of his ancestor, it is important that the outcome of the council in Rivendell does not just concern the future of the fated ring. Just as crucially, the council also effectively decides to reinstate the royal line in the kingdom of Gondor, which proves equally important in the subsequent struggle facing the Fellowship and the entire civilisation.³

Yet Aragorn's stepping into the "mythical shoes" is by no means automatic, since the main goal of the ritual was to admit the need for a spiritual intervention which would elevate his struggling contemporaries to mythical heroic greatness needed to face the present danger. This was because it was the special, closer bond with the spiritual that made the figures of the former age heroic, and consequently, "mythical". This means that the aim of the proceedings in this respect was not an investiture of Aragorn. It was a ritualistic call to the power that was responsible for elevating the likes of Elendil to mythical greatness, alongside a ritualistic sacrifice as the ring was symbolically laid by Frodo on the sacrificial altar as the decision was being made to renounce all its power and the temptation that it embodies.

Thus the need for humility is crucial at this stage, as it is aptly recognised by Aragorn:

Aragorn smiled at him; then he turned to Boromir again. 'For my part I forgive your doubt,' he said. 'Little do I resemble the figures of Elendil and Isildur as they stand carven in their majesty in the halls of Denethor. I am but the heir of Isildur, not Isildur himself.

The Fellowship of the Ring, 323.

³ To date, the most extensive analysis of the heroic dimension of the character of Aragorn in relation to the figure of Elendil has been covered in E.M. Stephen's 2012 *Hobbit to Hero* (90-92; 142-144; 190-193). Stephen writes, "within the mythology, Aragorn's heroism is most compatible with that of Elendil, [...]" (Stephen 2012; 190). Stephen also stresses the dynamic quality of Aragorn's ascent to greatness of heroic kingship (190-193). While the present argument confirms these findings, it is to be hoped that perceiving the entire process in terms of the relationship between two distinct planes of the secondary world may further extend the perspective.

For all that Aragorn, gradually steps up to the role of the heir of Elendil and succeeds in bringing the myth into the present, completing it in its re-enactment:

The Sword of Elendil was forged anew by Elvish smiths, and on its blade was traced a device of seven stars set between the crescent Moon and the rayed Sun, and about them was written many runes; for Aragorn son of Arathorn was going to war upon the marches of Mordor. Very bright was that sword when it was made whole again; the light of the sun shone redly in it, and the light of the moon shone cold, and its edge was hard and keen. And Aragorn gave it a new name and called it Andúril, Flame of the West.

The Fellowship of the Ring, 360

It should be noted that no doubt ever arises as to whether the grandeur of the mythical story from the past will have the inevitable effect of reinforcing Aragorn's messianic role and bolstering his royal claim beyond the mere considerations of natural birthright. Throughout the narrative nobody questions the fact that, if the figure of Elendil should have any impact upon the present, it applies solely Aragorn and his role as the undisputed heir to the greatness of the past is never put in doubt. Thus the myth mainly plays a communal role and it does not have a comparable personal bearing on any of the other characters. Indeed, as Aragorn's own mythical significance increases, the gap between him and the others widens.

As we progress further in Tolkien's narrative, the figure of Elendil becomes ever more present in the story as Aragorn becomes the living incarnation of the mythical ruler. In a sense, this allows the myth to overtake the present time: by making contact with the mythical plain, the present all but loses its character – it becomes part of the timeless heroic reality which is subject to the Providential design immanent in the universal history. Such seems to be the philosophy behind Galadriel's words spoken to Aragorn during the Fellowship's stay in Lorien:

In this hour take the name that was foretold for you, Elessar, the Elfstone of the House of Elendil!

The Fellowship of the Ring, 489.

It is important that, as the myth and the present merge, the historical context of the complex life-story and fortunes of Elendil becomes gradually subordinated to the present needs and concerns – Elendil is now primarily a king who was able to stem the rising tide of evil in defence of the human kingdoms of Middle-earth. This allows Aragorn to develop an almost physical identification with his mythical ancestor:

Aragorn threw back his cloak. The elven-sheath glittered as he grasped it, and the bright blade of Andúril shone like a sudden flame as he swept it out. ‘Elendil!’ he cried. ‘I am Aragorn son of Arathorn, and am called Elessar, the Elfstone, Dúnadan, the heir of Isildur Elendil’s son of Gondor. Here is the Sword that was Broken and is forged again!.

The Two Towers, 563-563.

Just how much the whole scheme is now ruled by mechanisms and powers beyond the usual political realities becomes clear when we hear the dismayed Faramir; he perceives the return of the rightful heir to the throne of Gondor purely in terms of how the news will improve the morale of his embattled compatriots:

‘What hope have we?’ said Faramir. ‘It is long since we had any hope. The sword of Elendil, if it returns indeed, may rekindle it, but I do not think that it will do more than put off the evil day, unless other help unlooked-for also comes, from Elves or Men. For the Enemy increases and we decrease. We are a failing people, a springless autumn. (...).

The Two Towers, 885-886.

Nevertheless, it appears as though the physical person of Aragorn has long lost any individual traits and has become an embodiment and even an actual instrument of the beneficial Providence which comes to the forefront in the final days of the encounter with Sauron’s forces. Nowhere is this more notable than in the vision of Aragorn leading the flotilla of ships effectively lifting the siege of Gondor. The effect is highlighted by the fact that the whole scene is vocalised internally by Merry:

And then wonder took him, and a great joy; and he cast his sword up in the sunlight and sang as he caught it. And all eyes followed his gaze, and

behold! upon the foremost ship a great standard broke, and the wind displayed it as she turned towards the Harlond. There flowered a White Tree, and that was for Gondor; but Seven Stars were about it, and a high crown above it, the signs of Elendil that no lord had borne for years beyond count. And the stars flamed in the sunlight, for they were wrought of gems by Arwen daughter of Elrond; and the crown was bright in the morning, for it was wrought of mithril and gold.

The Return of the King, 1109.

By this stage, the physical person of Aragorn is basically submerged in the emblems identifying him as the heir to Elendil. This is the natural consequence of the fact that Aragorn becomes a catalyst for the hierophanic connection between the heroic mythical past and the precarious present. The mythical hierophany is finally achieved at the moment of Aragorn's coronation; it is notable that the symbolic moment is marked by the new king repeating the exact words of his mythical ancestor:

Then Aragorn took the crown and held it up and said: Et Eärello Endoreenna utúlien. Sinome maruvan ar Hildinyar tenn' Ambar-metta! And those were the words that Elendil spoke when he came up out of the Sea on the wings of the wind: 'Out of the Great Sea to Middle-earth I am come. In this place will I abide, and my heirs, unto the ending of the world.'

The Return of the King, 1267 -8

Thus the oral formula is once again used to invoke the spiritual strength and significance of the myth which has served to uplift the present to face the current threat. Significantly, there is no written record of the actual words spoken by Elendil on the occasion; however, given the degree of objectivity with which communal memory preserves and stores historical data, there is no need for any such record.

Here we observe a culmination of the oral ritual and the process which was initiated during the council in Rivendell. As Aragorn effectively merges into one with the figure of Elendil, a respite from the endless struggle with evil is achieved, and it appears that Aragorn is now destined to become the embodiment of the kind of heroic greatness of which Elendil was hitherto a symbol. In other words, we

witness the culmination of the process of Aragorn entering into the reality of the myth and acquiring a new identity as the myth's present-day incarnation. Thus, as M. Eliade reiterates after Chadwick: "Myth is the last, not the first, stage in the development of a hero." (Eliade, 42). The coronation itself is the ritual which constitutes the hierophanic point of connection between the present and the eternal foundational moment of the heroic past. As P. Connerton writes, the ritual constitutes an act of communal participation in the myth which it expresses and, as such, it establishes a relationship which involves its participants in a process of identification with the core of the meaning which the myth has developed to transmit (116-132).

In this way, the myth of Elendil becomes renewed and rejuvenated in its latest incarnation. In fact, the life stories of the two characters are now quite alike: in both cases we have a royal descendant turned renegade dissident leading a long and perilous journey which culminates in creating a new world order in the wake of a victory over evil. Thus there is no malice in saying that most of the formulaic material of the heroic song which has so far underscored the memory and mythical position of Elendil would, after some adaptation, serve well to exhort the deeds of the newly restored king of Gondor.

Aragorn's role has been to revitalise the myth ensuring its prolonged existence and relevance in the various societies of Middle-earth. It is notable that no other character in the story is in any sense personally inspired by the figure of Elendil – the significance of the myth is solely communal and thus at any given time there can only be one receptacle for the present significance of the story. While the myth undoubtedly becomes a source of inspiration and hope in the general effort in the fight with the menace posed by Sauron, the way the power of the myth operates is to focus and centralise the individual struggles around a single figure of undisputed authority and leadership who takes on the task to focus the universal struggle with evil. Aragorn acts with commendable generosity during his coronation in acknowledging the individual achievements of other members of the Fellowship. In ceremonial recognition of the feats of the likes of Frodo or Gandalf, the act of bestowing praise for their great personal sacrifice must come from an undisputed political and moral authority – a role taken up by Aragorn as he sets off down the road to

rejuvenate and extend the epic greatness of the past by bringing all the grandeur of history back into the present. This is the primary role of the myth in Tolkien's universe, as the pointed and concise remark in *The Silmarillion* sums up:

He was Aragorn son of Arathorn, the nine and thirtieth heir in the right line from Isildur, and yet more like Elendil than any before him.

The Silmarillion, 377.

III. Heroic Myth in George R. R. Martin: Nymeria

When we turn our attention to the work of George R.R. Martin, we find that myth interplays with the basic reality of the secondary world very differently. Here, the world's equivalent myth possesses nothing of the monolithic, overwhelming character we saw in Tolkien; however, as far as we can tell, it largely achieves a similar effect. The story of Nymeria is referred to by a number of characters and it enriches the texture of Martin's imagined world by providing an occasional, vital point of reference; however, its underlying focal point is far more elusive and seems to emerge in a roundabout way via the isolated, personal experiences of those whose individual lives contribute to the epic sweep of Martin's story. In yet another sense, the myth is dissipated into its constituent elements; it crops up in various forms of what we would term as "popular culture", and it is perceived differently by different characters and adapted to different roles depending circumstances.

It is thus significant that "chronologically" the first reference to the myth of Nymeria is found in the text of *Fire and Blood* – the chronicle account of the first two centuries of the Targaryen rule in Westeros. Nymeria is mentioned in the comment made by the king's Hand Lord Rogar Baratheon at the ascension to the throne of Westeros by his royal protégé Jaehaerys I. Lord Rogar dismisses the claim to the throne coming from Jaehaerys' elder sister Rhaena, saying, "This is not Dorne (...) and Rhaena is not Nymeria." (108). Here we have a clear testimony of the story of Nymeria holding a wider significance which symbolically denotes a resilient female political figure

able to play a decisive role in matters of power and succession. It also places Nymeria above the present, “ordinary” time in which figures involved in power politics do not normally rise to the standard of the figures for the foundational past when the present-day political and social reality was being forged. In other words, Nymeria is, for Lord Rogar, a mythical figure as her memory embodies a certain potentially renewable type of a heroic character. Yet Nymeria is also painted in a negative, disparaging context, for she seems to represent an ideal which is relative, bound to the social specificity of Westeros’ endemically rebellious province. In this understanding, Nymeria is more of an unwelcome spectre of the past than a model for heroic behaviour because she also symbolised the stubborn determination of Dorne to resist Targaryen rule. Since the heroic myth has several different aspects, its impact on individual characters is also relative and holds none of the monolithic absolute quality found in *The Lord of the Rings*.

The next reference to Nymeria is found “a century and a half later” in the novella *The Hedge Knight*. We encounter a troupe of Dornish puppeteers entertaining the crowd with their theatre show during a tournament held at the town of Ashford located in the Reach:

As the shadows of evening crept across the meadow, a hundred torches were lit along the merchant’s row. Dunk bought a horn of ale for himself and half a horn for the boy, to cheer him. They wandered for a time, listening to a sprightly air on pipes and drums and watching a puppet show about Nymeria, the warrior queen with the ten thousand ships. The puppeteers had only two ships, but managed a rousing sea battle all the same.

Hedge Knight, 67.

Here the heroic legend from deep history is shown at a stage familiar from the cultural evolutions we see in the primary world. As is commonplace in a semi-literate feudal society, a traditional story will in time descend down the rungs of literary decorum to function in the wide-market, “popular” domain with the story slimmed down and adapted to meet the less elaborate conventions of its new register. Tolkien gave no hint of such fortunes of the heroic myth in Middle-earth. Here, the heroic story functions without heroic form and function, which never happens in Tolkien’s universe.

Thus in *The Hedge Knight* the topic of the puppet show may be taken to serve as a clandestine manifestation of opposition towards the ruling establishment and the Valyrian-descended Targaryen royal family. It also serves as an early hint and backdrop to the subsequent brutal treatment of the Dornish heroine by the Targaryen prince. Interestingly, if we were to compare this situation to that which we encountered in *The Lord of the Rings*, it is clear that the subversive function in which the myth of Nymeria appears here has its counterpart in Aragorn's invoking of the myth of Elendil in the context of validating his claim to the throne of Gondor. Yet, although the rise of Aragorn may be seen as an inevitable threat to the political status quo and thus also serve a subversive function, the myth he embodies does not appear in any corresponding low register incarnation.

The importance of such treatment of the mythical story in the case of Martin's secondary world is that it reveals another aspect of the nature and role of myth in *A Song of Ice and Fire*. The myth does not hold one single underlying meaning which invariably upholds and justifies the dominant culture in the community in which it has emerged. The way the heroic story functions in Martin's universe is more equivocal and often directly subversive as it interplays with other forms and manifestations of culture and politics. The myth of Nymeria is used in the counterrepresentative mode, but it also functions at a level from which it cannot reconfigure cultural memory into an ascent of hopeful expectation of the future. The myth remains an act of defiance; it is also in itself a testimony of the degradation of Dornish national identity, since the context and register in which it now appears is low.

Another important point here is the relativism in different characters' attitude to the same mythical story: something which is an abject sellout of national ethos for necessary immediate commercial gain for Dornish actors is, for casual spectators, an instance of watching a semi-fabulous story from a distant past in the pursuit of innocent entertainment.

Let us now look at another occasion when the story of the Roynish princess is invoked, and move on in time to enter the main narrative of *A Song of Ice and Fire*. During the kingsmoot, or the general meeting of the nobility of the Iron Islands gathered together for the purpose

of electing a new leader following the unexpected death of King Balon Greyjoy, one of the pretenders to the crown – the supremely shallow-minded Lord Gylbert Farwynd – uses the myth of Nymeria as part of his corny torrent of electioneering propaganda, as he unveils a cheap vision of an indulgent promised land hoping to capitalise on the weakness of his compatriots' intellectual capabilities:

Lord Gylbert began to speak. He told of a wondrous land beyond the Sunset Sea, a land without winter or want, where death had no dominion. "Make me your king, and I shall lead you there," he cried. "We will build ten thousand ships as Nymeria once did and take sail with all our people to the land beyond the sunset. There every man shall be a king and every wife a queen."

A Feast for Crows, 215.

It is worth remembering here that no such use of the myth of Elendil was ever attempted in the course of war with Sauron. While in *The Lord of the Rings* the heroic myth appeared immune to similar forms of misuse and corruption, here the mythical story is adapted to the requirements of political manipulation and strained to enhance the propaganda used during an election meeting. In one sense, the whole scene is a testimony to the enduring appeal of Nymeria's story to the various nations inhabiting Westeros. In another, it presents further ways in which the heroic story is degraded. It is a different sort of transformation from the one we encountered in *The Hedge Knight* as the myth is not so much transposed from its original context to serve the needs of entertainment, but rather remade into a self-mocking simplistic parody of itself. Although the heroic myth would have naturally served to provide a point of reference in the reinforcement of the communal ethos on state occasions as this one, here the particularly vulgar rendition and adaptation of the story calls into doubt its traditional, ceremonial function. What appears similar in the two examples is that in both cases the mythical story is used in at least partly subversive, reflecting the tensions in the narrative, rather than affirming any specific ethical or cultural consensus.

Another important factor is that a juxtaposition of the two scenes further highlights the aspect of individual reception of a communal

story like the heroic myth, as the reformulations and uses of mythical stories are conditioned by the response and reaction of the characters from within the story.

These two circumstances – the subversive context and the individuality of personal response – come once more to the foreground in the scene at Jeffrey Baratheon’s court in King’s Landing, where the captive Sansa becomes a reluctant witness to a courtly minstrel entertainment featuring a number of traditional stories:

After the meal had been cleared away, many of the guests asked leave to go to the sept. Cersei graciously granted their request. Lady Tanda and her daughters were among those who fled. For those who remained, a singer was brought forth to fill the hall with the sweet music of the high harp. He sang of Jonquil and Florian, of Prince Aemon the Dragonknight and his love for his brother’s queen, of Nymeria’s ten thousand ships. They were beautiful songs, but terribly sad. Several of the women began to weep, and Sansa felt her own eyes growing moist.

A Clash of Kings, 525.

The rationale behind the reference to Nymeris is largely the same as in previously discussed passages. Together with other stories of similar status, the myth of Nymeria provides a most cynical backdrop to the ways and customs of Jeffrey’s royal court. As Nymeria’s story is emphatically one celebrating female heroism and endurance, hearing it must clearly be a painful experience for Sansa. In one sense, Sansa is very much another lone female survivor living through the destruction of her own kind. Nevertheless, her miserable lingering at King’s Landing is no doubt to be contrasted with Nymeria’s active and decisive leadership.

In yet another sense, the context for heroic stories has the effect of underlining Sansa’s loneliness at the southern court: being a northerner and consequently of the Old Religion, the young woman is not permitted to join the southern ladies as they go to pray in the sept. As a sort of equivalent diversion, Sansa is treated to a selection of traditional stories which would usually be meant to be uplifting; however, here they serve as another form of psychological torture. Thus the story of Nymeria becomes effectively contrasted with the

spiritual experience of religious worship; it is transformed into its shallow courtly equivalent, which further contributes to the air of tawdry spectacle which permeates the scene.

The Nymeria story itself, however exquisitely it might be told, would be rendered tawdry and clichéd by the very context of its appearance. This is important because, in the majority of worlds, fictitious or otherwise, a skilled minstrel's performance at a royal court would be far removed from "popular", mass-market renditions to be found at tournaments and fairs. Yet, here it seems to function in a context which underscores the story's conventionality and inadequacy, which positions it in essentially the same context as the previously discussed instances when the myth is recalled.

The essential common quality and character of the use of the myth in the three passages is further stressed by the appearance of the ubiquitous formula of the "ten thousand ships". While this formulaic phrase would normally carry high-brow implications of the high register in which it would have been forged, here it is merely a conventional addition to Nymeria's name, and its constant repetition contributes more to the air of unimaginative conventionality surrounding the three instances of the use of the story rather than serving as a hint at the myth's heroic register.

Let us now move on in our discussion to how the myth of Nymeria is perceived by Arya – perhaps the character most obviously affected by the figure of the "warrior queen". Arguably no one else on the continent of Westeros is more keen on consciously embracing Nymeria as a personal role model. Arya first chooses the name of the Roynish princess for her direwolf cub. Later, while working as a kitchen maid at Harrenhal, she pronounces Nymeria to be her real name, then finally claims it was the name of the fictitious ship which apparently brought her to Braavos.

On the one hand, the Arya's idol-worship of Nymeria is essentially based upon false presumptions, since Nymeria was not, in any meaningful way, a "warrior queen" and her chief virtues were political shrewdness, leadership skills and stubborn endurance. Yet, for all the simplifications and misrepresentations which the forging of a teenage role model will inevitably involve, it is important to note that the tangled and dramatic fortunes which Lord Eddard Stark's

daughter endured ever since her father's death made it necessary for Arya to display these very qualities on more than one occasion. In fact, as far as it was possible at her age, Arya resembled Nymeria more than she realised, since her awareness of historical facts was not particularly extensive. Here, Nymeria is no more than a symbol of resistance against the oppressive establishment, essentially shorn of any meaningful historical context.

Such treatment of the Roynish icon stands in stark contrast to the way Nymeria is perceived by the Targaryens. Thus Maester Aemon, on recalling his first arrival at the Wall to join the Watch, mentions Nymeria in a very different context:

No recruit had arrived at the Wall with so much pomp since Nymeria sent the Watch six kings in golden fetters. Egg emptied out the dungeons too, so I would not need to say my vows alone. My honor guard, he called them. One was no less a man than Brynden Rivers. Later he was chosen lord commander.

A Feast for Crows, 172.

Here Nymeria is firmly a figure of history – a politician and ruthless ruler recalled with an air of menace. From the point of view of a Targaryen, the connotations of the figure of Nymeria are thus not in essence heroic; the episode mentioned here by Maester Aemon is, significantly, not invoked by anyone else in the course of Martin's epic tale, partly because the aged maester's knowledge of distant history goes well beyond that which is preserved in general communal memory. This, in turn, is subject to the same inescapable processes of decay and corruption as is the case in the primary world. What the passage seems to chiefly indicate is that the understanding of the life and times of Nymeria would be significantly enriched or changed by exploring the historical annals describing the complex history of Westeros (and of Essos) in fine detail. What we get here is a tantalising glimpse of a hidden layer which the communal vision of heroic figures of the past does not preserve.

Similarly, when Daenerys mentions Nymeria, the context has nothing to do with the reinstatement of the heroic ethos, but rather with the intricate web of contemporary power politics:

“It would please me if he had turned up with these fifty thousand swords he speaks of. Instead he brings two knights and a parchment. Will a parchment shield my people from the Yunkai’i? If he had come with a fleet ...” “Sunspear has never been a sea power, Your Grace.” “No.” Dany knew enough of Westerosi history to know that. Nymeria had landed ten thousand ships upon Dorne’s sandy shores, but when she wed her Dornish prince she had burned them all and turned her back upon the sea forever.

A Dance with Dragons, 1090.

The spectre of Nymeria returns here, perhaps understandably, in the context of the political manoeuvrings between the last successor of that special, tainted brand of greatness of the Targaryens before their decline and subsequent destruction and her newly-found Dornish allies. As Daenerys comes in state to hear the missive brought by Quentyn Martell, the son and heir of the ruler of Dorne, Doran Martell, she complains of Dorne’s inability to offer any real military assistance to her in her designs of reconquering Westeros. Since the beleaguered ruler of Meereen is most in need of a fleet, Daenerys acerbically recalls Nymeria’s decision to burn the ships her people arrived on as partly responsible for Dorne’s shortcomings in maritime warfare. The recent upheaval of fortunes for both the Targaryens and Martells has resulted in the creation of much common ground and political purpose, chiefly because the rebellion which brought down House Targaryens also resulted in the death of Elia Martell and her daughter. Yet the obstinately guarded independence of Dorne during the three centuries of Targaryen rule in Westeros seems to be partly responsible for the shadow of mistrust hanging over the mutual relations. In this context, Nymeria is no epic hero to be worshipped and emulated, but rather a past historical ruler prone to grave strategic errors, at least partly responsible for the present shortcomings of her country.

The same cautiously critical attitude towards Nymeria is notable in the mental comments made by Maester Aemon and Daenerys, and the same conspicuous lack of appreciation for the heroic aura in which the mythical figure is held by many others.

It is also important in this context that, when Nymeria is invoked by Prince Quentyn on his sea voyage from Dorne to Meereen, his own thoughts foreshadow those of Daenerys:

“Do we have enough gold to buy a ship?” “And who will sail her? You? Me?” Dornishmen had never been seafarers, not since Nymeria burned her ten thousand ships. “The seas around Valyria are perilous, and thick with corsairs.” “I have had enough of corsairs. Let’s not buy a ship.”

A Dance with Dragons, 1058.

What is invoked here is the same plain historical truth; however, in the context of the passage and especially with the benefit of hindsight, the statement joins the air of wistful regret and acknowledgement of one’s own inadequacy with a gloomy premonition of the tragic outcome of Quentyn’s ill-fated journey. This is even more pronounced if we consider that there is something eerily unnatural in the fact that the spectre of Nymeria haunts the distant descendant of the “warrior queen” and a prospective inheritor of the kingdom she created as he embarks on a journey which is meant to end with a proposal of marriage and political union with the person representing the last remaining bastion of the Valyrian civilisation.

Another pivotal figure in Martin’s grand narrative who reveals yet another aspect of the mythical story is Tyrion Lannister. Tyrion is first smuggled by Varys from King’s Landing to join the entourage of Daenerys Targaryen residing in Meereen; as he continues his journey as a prisoner of Ser Jorah Mormont, he finds himself travelling up the river Royne, repeating in reverse Nymeria’s desperate voyage to escape the wrath of the Valyrian empire:

“Where are we?” Tyrion asked him. “We have not yet left the Flatlands, my hasty friend. Soon our road shall pass into the Velvet Hills. There we begin our climb toward Ghoyan Drohe, upon the Little Rhoyme.” Ghoyan Drohe had been a Rhoynar city, until the dragons of Valyria had reduced it to a smoldering desolation. I am traveling through years as well as leagues, Tyrion reflected, back through history to the days when dragons ruled the earth.

A Dance with Dragons, 146.

Here yet another perspective on the mythical story unveils itself. For Tyrion, the tale of Nymeria has all the appeal of a thrilling historical narrative, and the opportunity to see the sites of historical events provides a refined pleasure of the intellectual and the connoisseur,

which alone has the power to relieve some of the despondency which recent events of his own life have brought upon him:

It was the next day before they reached the site of Ghoyan Drohe, hard beside the river. "The fabled Rhoyme," said Tyrion when he glimpsed the slow green waterway from atop a rise. "The Little Rhoyme," said Duck. "It is that." A pleasant enough river, I suppose, but the smallest fork of the Trident is twice as wide, and all three of them run swifter. The city was no more impressive. Ghoyan Drohe had never been large, Tyrion recalled from his histories, but it had been a fair place, green and flowering, a city of canals and fountains. Until the war. Until the dragons came. A thousand years later, the canals were choked with reeds and mud, and pools of stagnant water gave birth to swarms of flies. The broken stones of temples and palaces were sinking back into the earth, and gnarled old willows grew thick along the riverbanks.

A Dance with Dragons, 205.

Another river, he knew at once, rushing toward the Rhoyme. The ruins grew taller as the land grew narrower, until the city ended on a point of land where stood the remains of a colossal palace of pink and green marble, its collapsed domes and broken spires looming large above a row of covered archways. Tyrion saw more 'snappers sleeping in the slips where half a hundred ships might once have docked. He knew where he was then. That was Nymeria's palace, and this is all that remains of Ny Sar, her city.

A Dance with Dragons, 322.

This latest take on the story of Nymeria is essentially the detached view of the historian and the scholar, as Tyrion does not overtly seek to identify himself with the figure of the Roynish noblewoman. The pleasure of discovering sites of historical interest and thus finding oneself surrounded by the scenery of momentous past events mirrors some of Tyrion's current state of mind in its atmosphere of wistful regret. The function of the setting of Tyrion's journey at this stage is twofold: it projects, through images of ruin and desolation, an image corresponding to the destruction and decay of Westeros, but it also provides the solace of detached, wistful contemplation. Although Nymeria herself is not perceived by Tyrion as anything more than a historical figure, the epic grandeur of history emerging from his contemplation of historical sites is as overwhelming and palpable

for the reader as it is for Tyrion. As before, the all-important factor is the internal, personalised point of view, with Tyrion's erudition and sensitivity evoking the aura of epic history from the scenery of his journey.

Another important factor emerges: by juxtaposing the three passages featuring Lord Gilbert, Quentyn and Tyrion, a certain pattern emerges in their isolated internal viewpoints as it becomes apparent that the figure of Nymeria reappears time and again in the context of Daenerys. It seems that the shadow of the mythical figure re-emerges most forcefully for characters who embark on their separate journeys with the intention of meeting the Targaryen princess. In turn, she starts to acquire at least some of the traits of the Roynish queen, and, if she is destined to finally acquire a fleet of her own in the remaining course of the narrative, the similarity will inevitably increase dramatically. When we consider that Tyrion's journey retraces Nymeria's historical journey in reverse, we see the old story becoming relevant to the present. At the same time it should be stressed that none of the three intended or actual journeys in any way resemble a heroic quest because all the three characters, for all their extreme differences, seem equally doomed in their respective ways.

Nevertheless, the importance of this pattern is that it provides evidence of an ever-growing connection between Daenerys and Nymeria. This would clearly bring this aspect of Martin's narrative closer to Tolkien's, although here the corresponding process of identification is brought about in a protracted, even tortured and incoherent way, as there is no fundamental unity of vision or approach among the characters, and the mode of internal focalisation adopted throughout Martin's narrative clearly strengthens the overall impression. Furthermore, the process of the identification of Daenerys and Nymeria happens on a different level than in Tolkien: Daenerys herself is not aware of it, since the association is mainly made on the narratorial level and is clearer to the readers than the characters, at least for the moment.

We have reached the point when we need to complete the survey of the various manifestations of Nymeria's myth in *A Song of Ice and Fire* by looking at how it is perceived by characters who are most invested in the story, namely the Dornish. This is the closest to how

the heroic myth is perceived in Tolkien: the communal specificity of cultural memory and the context of national identity become significant factors in the way different characters perceive the heroic story. This is despite the fact that the internal focalisation in Martin invariably takes the individual point of view to define the mode in which any form of social, communal perception of the myth is conveyed.

We previously mentioned the passage in which Nymeria is recalled by rince Quentyn on his ill-fated voyage. If we now enter Dorne itself, we encounter more manifestations of the myth's longevity and sustained relevance to the native population. In the case of Dorne the figure of Daenerys does not constitute a focal point of association, which adds more variety and complexity to the already entangled web of the different points of view surrounding the myth in Martin's universe.

We first notice a number of scenes where the visual motifs interwoven into the texture of the setting provide meaningful detail in the narrative. Prince Doran, head of House Martell, sitting in state, receives successive visits from his belligerent nieces urging him to capitalise on the protracted civil war engulfing Westeros to take revenge on the Lannisters for the brutal killing of Princess Elia. Nymeria's Roynish emblems appear side by side with the symbols of House Martell:

There were two seats on the dais, near twin to one another, save that one had the Martell spear inlaid in gold upon its back, whilst the other bore the blazing Rhoynish sun that had flown from the masts of Nymeria's ships when first they came to Dorne. The captain placed the prince beneath the spear and stepped away.

A Feast for Crows, 33.

In the scene when Ser Arys Oakheart, the knight sent to Dorne with the task of providing security to Princess Myrcella, is being seduced by Arianne Martell, the moment of the knight's final capitulation to the sensual charms of the Dornish princess is indicated by a view of a tapestry depicting the story of Nymeria:

He rolled off of her to sprawl staring at the ceiling. A great crack ran across it, from one wall to the other. He had not noticed that before, no more than

he had noticed the picture on the tapestry, a scene of Nymeria and her ten thousand ships.

A Feast for Crows, 146.

Both passages seem to point in the same direction, as in both cases the memory of the Roynish princess provides a backdrop for the action at a moment of underlying tension, whereby the imagery recalling Nymeria is a remainder of the cherished uniqueness and acumen for stubborn resistance and skilful intrigue which has been so characteristic of the Dornish. The figure of Nymeria functions here in a markedly different context from either the teenage infatuation of Arya or the intellectual interest of Tyrion. In Dorne, Nymeria is not a symbol of subversive resistance to the establishment, but a symbol of national pride and fiercely guarded unique ethnic identity. The figure of Nymeria is also central to the identity of women among Dorne's ruling elite. Once again we turn to Princess Arianne Martell as she seeks to find meaningful occupation for herself during the lonely days of house arrest following her participation in the unsuccessful coup d'état against Prince Doran's rule:

The princess was left alone to pace, and weep, and nurse her wounds. During the daylight hours she would try to read, but the books that they had given her were deadly dull: ponderous old histories and geographies, annotated maps, a dry-as-dust study of the laws of Dorne, *The Seven-Pointed Star* and *Lives of the High Septons*, a huge tome about dragons that somehow made them about as interesting as newts. Arianne would have given much and more for a copy of *Ten Thousand Ships* or *The Loves of Queen Nymeria*, anything to occupy her thoughts and let her escape her tower for an hour or two, but such amusements were denied her.

A Feast for Crows 466.

The books Arianne is yearning for are clearly morale building works destined for the popular market rather than the more scholarly renditions of the life of the Roynish heroine. In this sense, the figure of Nymeria provides as much inspiration and solace for Arianne as she does for Arya, although their understanding of the mythical figure differs significantly. While Arya quite naturally focuses on Nymeria's strength of character and capacity for endurance in the

face of overwhelming odds, for Arianne Nymeria is first and foremost an incarnation of the national spirit providing justification for Arianne's own political ambitions. In other words, for Arya acquiring Nymeria's qualities would make her immune to oppression and humiliation, while for Arianne seeking inspiration from Nymeria would help her develop essential qualities which would justify her claim to rule Dorne:

Arianne left them to their banter. Drey and Spotted Sylva were her dearest friends, aside from her cousin Tyene, and Garin had been teasing her since both of them were drinking from his mother's teats, but just now she was in no mood for japey. The sun was gone, and the sky was full of stars. So many. She leaned her back against a fluted pillar and wondered if her brother was looking at the same stars tonight, wherever he might be. Do you see the white one, Quentyn? That is Nymeria's star, burning bright, and that milky band behind her, those are ten thousand ships. She burned as bright as any man, and so shall I. You will not rob me of my birthright!

A Feast for Crows, 238.

Thus, as Princess Myrcella Baratheon has ample opportunity to learn, the unique status of the figure of Nymeria in Dorne is the natural outcome of a historical and political heritage of a people smarting from a sense of injured pride and seeing her primarily a national champion. Consequently, they perceive the whole Roynish history as a stage in a continuing struggle rather than a closed chapter. Tyrion sees it thus:

"Prince Oberyne was full of stories." Garin had been with them as well that day; he was Arianne's milk brother, and they had been inseparable since before they learned to walk. "He told about Prince Garin, I remember, the one that I was named for." "Garin the Great," offered Drey, "the wonder of the Rhoyme." "That's the one. He made Valyria tremble." "They trembled," said Ser Gerold, "then they killed him".

A Feast for Crows, 236.

Perhaps the most poignant manifestation of the continuation of the myth of Nymeria in the present life of the characters of *A Song of Ice and Fire* comes in the conversation in which Arianne explains to Myrcella the intricacies of the Dornish ethical and cultural heritage:

“How can you be orphans if you have mothers and fathers?” the girl asked. “They are the Rhoynar,” Arianne explained, “and their Mother was the river Rhoyme.”

Myrcella did not understand. “I thought you were the Rhoynar. You Dornishmen, I mean.”

“We are in part, Your Grace. Nymeria’s blood is in me, along with that of Mors Martell, the Dornish lord she married. On the day they wed, Nymeria fired her ships, so her people would understand that there could be no going back. Most were glad to see those flames, for their voyagings had been long and terrible before they came to Dorne, and many and more had been lost to storm, disease, and slavery. There were a few who mourned, however. They did not love this dry red land or its seven-faced god, so they clung to their old ways, hammered boats together from the hulks of the burned ships, and became the orphans of the Greenblood. The Mother in their songs is not our Mother, but Mother Rhoyme, whose waters nourished them from the dawn of days.”

A Feast for Crows, 242.

As is often the case in Martin’s fiction, the different viewpoints are designed to reflect on one another, and so the words of Arianne stand in most stark contrast with Tyrion’s relation to the times which gave rise to the myth of the Roynish princess. As we have seen before in the case of the people of Dorne, the decisive factor is the intimate, genetic connection with the historical past and its vision developed in the heroic stories. Paradoxically perhaps, in this most direct context of the descendants of the Rhoynish exiles, the legacy of Nymeria lives on because, for all her heroic efforts and achievements, the burden bestowed on her people could not be lifted or alleviated throughout the course of their subsequent history. Here, at the most intimate, core point of the connection between mythical history and present-day reality, we find a hereditary trail of destitution, grief and longing whereby the perspective which the mythical past lends to the present time swallows up the heroic greatness in the protracted consciousness of history. Thus, in Martin’s world myth loses its decorum of polished heroism as it comes in contact with the most intimate layer of reality: that of communal self-identification within which the cultural memory which transmits the myth is embedded. Here the greatness of a mythical figure like Nymeria would not be

the result of any personal qualities, but would rather be defined by the scale of the struggle faced by the individual on whom the weight of leadership was placed in those “heroic” times.

Such a perception of myth would arguably bring Martin’s world, in a roundabout way, closer to the values on which Tolkien’s secondary universe operates. However, it should be remembered that in the world of *A Song of Ice and Fire* the myth does not vindicate or illuminate the present time, but it merely provides a counterpoint perspective against which the characters can be measured and defined. Thus, in Martin’s secondary world, myth does not function at a level which would be superior to historical time, but rather myth and history become intertwined as two contrastive modes of conveying the past. In this conception, myth rises out of history to form a matrix of reference which reflects the cultural and ethical consensus existing within various communities and social groups, and it functions in this capacity as long as its relative validity is recognised by them. Failing that, myth melts back into history again. Consequently, myth finds itself at the mercy of the cultural specificity of societies and the mental scope of individuals because it does not possess one underlying, objective shape or meaning which would validate the abstracted sense of the entangled meanders of history. In any case, to comprehend such a sense is beyond the individual capacity of any of the characters; additionally, although there is here no divergence between differing variants of the myth, none of the individuals or social groups are able to grasp the fullness of its potential.

Thus, the reception of myth in Martin is more multifarious, made up of different approaches and applications, frequently independent to the point of incompatibility as they are meant to reflect the unique viewpoints of individual characters. Instead of a single monolithic vision with one unquestioned objective meaning and simple thrust of application, characteristic of Tolkien’s approach, *A Song of Ice and Fire* offers a vision where the variety of human life finds itself expressed in the characters’ divergent appropriations of the mythical story.

It seems that this prevalent sense of futility and failure which frequently determines the fate of Martin’s characters is one of the reasons for the unfulfilled, truncated nature of the mythical reality in Martin’s secondary universe.

This can be further elucidated by referring to Joseph Campbell's theory of the monomyth, as enshrined in his seminal study *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (Campbell 1975: 13-42). It seems that, by and large, Martin's characters are never fully able to cross the initial stage in the narrative progress of the mythical hero, which is the stage of *separation*, or *sparagmos* (Campbell 1975; 51-83). The destruction of successive characters' heroic potential through mental breakdown or violent death prevents them from crossing the "first threshold" of mythical progress and maroons them in aborted attempts to overcome the challenges of history.⁴

Nevertheless, the existence of the mythical layer in Martin is equally important in investing the fictional reality with a sense of time perspective through which the heroic quality of the narrative is articulated. Myth does not transfigure the present reality to make it express and communicate consensual ideals of heroic greatness. Instead, it creates the effect of involving the characters' fortunes in a timeless scheme whereby exceptional heroic endeavours become linked across the turns and cycles of history as they echo, and consequently enhance one another in their correspondence. Thus, in spite of their ultimate futility in the fight against the progress of history, the characters' heroic struggles become elevated above the tragedy of the present time as they participate in the timeless mythical reality which does not precede or envelop history but is abstracted from it to create a sense of continuity which reaches beyond the immediate individual perspective of any of the characters.

Despite the markedly different approach to the creation of the mythical layer of the secondary reality in the works of Tolkien and Martin, the heroic tradition bequeathed to us as part of medieval literary heritage constitutes an integral, organic element of the narrative apparatus of modern high fantasy fiction and an indispensable constituent layer in the texture of secondary fantasy worlds.

⁴ I am grateful to Prof. A. Wicher for this suggestion.

Chapter II

The Motif of the Forest

I. The Forest in the Medieval Literary Tradition

The prominence of the motif of the forest in medieval literature and its unique function in shaping the setting of medieval narratives is in no way surprising, as it clearly reflects the importance of the forest both as the dominant element of the natural landscape and as a key element in determining the general outlook and social and economic relationships of the human communities emerging from under the shadow of its ancient supremacy. In fact, in the course of the millennium traditionally thought of as the Middle Ages, human civilisation gradually achieved a redefinition of its relationship with its natural neighbour, as it could finally treat the forest as being encompassed by the human habitat rather than the other way round, as had originally been the case. Despite that, the forest never truly lost its aura of being an autonomous, independent organism, least penetrated by the norms and customs taken for granted in human society and the human-shaped environment. Yet, despite this gradual transition, the medieval cognitive propensity to experience space concentrically ensured that the forest continued to be perceived in relation to the outside space and it did not truly undergo a complete reformulation into a binary relationship with the social space of dominant human habitation until well into the Renaissance.

At the same time, the forest remained society's most cherished and indispensable reservoir of the most essential products of daily subsistence, as for most of the period the majority of food products and raw materials still derived ultimately from the forests. Consequently, as this big, unwieldy organism became a jealously guarded symbol of social status, wealth and influence, it never, for all that, lost its status of being a place of refuge from society's constraints and limitations. This in turn underscores the underlying independence of the forest which, despite being indispensable to human civilisation, is in itself thoroughly self-reliant and self-sufficient.¹

Consequently, the forest of medieval literature reflects this special status in a number of varying but interrelated ways. First and foremost, the forest constitutes the ultimate "outside" in relation to the human-dominated world. Even when it no longer dominates the human dwellings, surrounding and looming over them with unconcerned superiority, it nevertheless invariably marks the boundary beyond which the underlying social and interpersonal relationships incumbent on the members of human society lose their arbitrary, unquestionable character and give way to different, more deep-seated impulses. Hence, in the literary culture of the day, the motif of the forest is primarily a receptacle for conveying the varying manifestations of otherness, both in the immediately relevant social sense relating to the undermining of the norms of social status and behaviour, and as pertaining to the penetration of the mundane physical world by both the sublunary quality of the marvellous and the hierophanic quality of the spiritual.

Arguably, the forest is not the only definably self-contained spatial location which could be contrastively juxtaposed against the space dominated by human habitation, and a lot of what we have stated above may be also said about other spatial constructs, such as the desert, or the "wilderness", and such was frequently the contemporaneous semantic range of the word.² Yet in order to narrow the

¹ The socio-historical context of the forest in the medieval period has been extensively researched by C. J. Saunders 1993: 1-24, Classen 2015: 1-21, and Samsonowicz 2015: 49-140. The present study follows the findings and conclusions of this research.

² Compare Rudd 2010: 91-132, Saunders 1993: 1-2.

focus sufficiently to be able to perceive the forest as a unique organic entity, we shall henceforth adopt an approach which would seek to account for the individual specificity of the presentation of the forest as a natural organism. We shall duly seek to account for the coexistence and interaction of the spatial construct defined as a “forest” with the neighbouring human habitat and especially the motif of crossing the boundary separating the two worlds and the impact it carries for the literary works where it appears.

Seeking to duly recognizing recent tendencies in ecocritical research,³ we shall henceforth attempt to remain sensitive, throughout the analysis, to the conceptual distinction between various aspects relevant to the function and significance of the motif of the forest within the fictional worlds which will be subject of our discussion. Thus when using the term “forest environment”, we will mean the forest in its role as an element of the spatial setting of the narrative, whereas “forest habitat” will denote the forest as it is perceived by the characters of the narrative and as it functions within their spatial consciousness and contributes to the formation of their identity. Finally, “forest ecosystem” will be used whenever the argument concerns the forest as a living entity created by the sum of organic interrelations between the various lifeforms which remain in a symbiotic contact within the space of the forest.

The first thing one may notice while trying to determine the position and status of the forest in medieval perception is the underlying association of the forest motif with the idea of an alternative to the extra-human space. Although invariably manifested as the outside, the forest is simultaneously an exclusive and very hermetic construct which never seeks integration or encroaches upon the human-dominated space, but rather draws one inside a spatial entity organised around some impenetrable core.

Studying the depiction of the forest in medieval literature, we may observe how the setting of the various narratives revolves around an underlying dichotomy between the human-determined space, marked by all the familiarity of social norm, custom and Christian ritual, and the adjacent space of the forest, where the markers that

³ See here especially Rudd 2010: 48-87.

have made spatial environment of the human civilisation so comfortably reassuring are rendered invalid and become superseded by whatever has been pushed outside the human-dominated environment. Thus the forest is not an expanse of space which separates segments of “civilised” space – it is not thought of as an intermediary between any other spatial entities. Instead, the forest is conceived of as a sort of concentric, spatial black hole where the normal space orientation becomes temporarily suspended and where one is sucked ever deeper into the layers of a kind of reality which normally remain outside human experience. That kind of forest has no determined end and no “other side”, because it becomes elevated out of the regular spatial continuum to incorporate the various manifestations of the marvellous against which the protagonists will have to measure themselves. This in itself will elevate the space of the forest beyond any perceptual continuity or geographical relationship with the more ordinary stretches of commonplace landscape which, in the wake of a prolonged contact with the everyday routine of mundane social life, have become domesticated out of all wonder.

Let us in this spirit attempt to trace the motif of the forest as it unveils across the ascending variety of literary genres of the Middle English period. If we humbly and reverently begin at the threshold of the pre-modern consciousness through the genre of the folk ballad and take a look at such classic examples of narratives as *Tam Lin* or *Thomas the Rhymer*, we shall observe how the characters’ penetration through the invisible barrier marked by the edge of the forest exposes them to a world where the familiar sureties and constraints of the feudal world order and the Christian religion seem to lose their hold on the individual’s intellect and will. Already the idea of a transgression or failure of some sort reasserts itself here as the original reason for being entangled in the reality of otherness which dominates the forest environment. Thus once one wanders into the forest at an unpropitious time, partakes of its natural products as food or drink, engages in a reckless physical relationship or merely falls from one’s horse, one is in danger of developing an attachment and an organic link to the forest which, working alongside the principles of sympathetic magic, may make it difficult, or impossible, to resume a normal life in human society. In this context the pervading medieval

dichotomy between wood and iron re-asserts itself in a most direct and palpable way upon characters who, like the unfortunate Thomas of Lynn, cannot by their own devices extricate themselves from being trapped at the other side of iron.

It is also by plunging into the impenetrable space of the forest that one comes into contact with spatial planes that are not accessible from any other location and which form a platform for contact with spheres dominated by the magical and finally with the spiritual. Hence the motif of the crossroads will correspond here to the reciprocal status of the realms of heaven, hell and the fairyland, and thus the forest geography will have the function of exemplifying and reinforcing these relations.

All these elements emerge in their whole haunting poignancy in scenes like the visitation made by the dead sons upon their mother in *The Wife of Usher's Well* where the visitors' unearthly status is indicated by a reference to the birchen hats they wear:

It neither grew in syke nor ditch,
 Nor yet in ony sheugh;
 But at the gates o' Paradise
 That birk grew fair eneugh.

Wife of Usher's Well.

Here the "hats o' birk" worn by the diseased sons as they cross the boundary between the two worlds at turning of the natural year and the cycle of rural husbandry marked by the feast of St. Martin define the visitors' status as belonging to the space which lies beyond the characteristically human-made divisions of land relating to matters of property or social function. Essentially, the trees that grow here at the gates of Paradise serve as markers of a boundary and a division, but in this case the trees mark a threshold between two distinct, but connected plains of reality, which are here relicts of the medieval continuum whereby created universe becomes ever more saturated with the spiritual as it gradually ascends towards the limitless expanses of pure spirit which extend beyond the boundaries of Creation.⁴

⁴ See also Erickson 1976: 8, 24.

The trees are thus now a sign of an arbitrary division of the profane space, but in this capacity they seem to serve as mediators facilitating contact between the earthly world located at the bottom of Creation and the more ethereal regions where the more spiritual fabric of reality allows no natural meeting point. In other words, the trees are here more a link between the two worlds than a sign of a defensive border – the avowedly material birch boughs may be worn here by spirits, thus effectively merging the two realities enough for the contact between the loved ones to be made.

In this context it will not be surprising that the entranceways to Hell or the Underworld in *The Odyssey*, *The Aeneid* and finally in *The Divine Comedy* all proceed through the forest, which in such cases does not as much surround a point of contact between the two worlds, but rather terminates in such a point. Thus the echo of the motif of the Virgilian golden bough seems to reverberate through the verses of the folk ballad.

Taking now one step up the social ladder we will be led into the more direct social realism of rural life as it is reflected in the most elaborate example of the Robin Hood tradition – the boisterous amalgam of the ballad and the romance called *The Gest of Robin Hood*:

We be yemen of this foreste,
Under the grene wode tre;
We lyve by our kynges dere,
Under the grene wode tre.

The Gest of Robin Hood, ll. 1505-1508.

The social impact of the evolving legal ramifications governing the maintenance of royal forests and access to them throughout the medieval epoch has been widely studied.⁵ What is of most interest at the present stage of our argument is the interaction between the legal framework obtaining for most of the period and the entrenched mental habits which determined the way the forest functions in the literary output of the day. At its core, the very idea of the forest as

⁵ See, for instance, Charles R. Young's *The Royal Forests of Medieval England* (1979), or J. Aberth's *An Environmental History of the Middle Ages* (2015).

an extensive and exclusive spatial domain, set aside from the rest of the rural and urban space and characterised by a separate and restrictive legal status, helped forge the dominant social perception of the forest as a distinct, alternative reality where the harsh legal restrictions designed to preserve the rights of those situated uppermost in the feudal hierarchy were paradoxically most challenged by the more primeval needs of self-sustenance experienced by those in no position to enjoy the various benefits of the natural bounty so directly vital for the feudal economy. Thus living in the forest “by our kynges dere” is also living not by social decorum, but by the principle of animal instinct, of intuitive and intimate self-interest and the urge for self-preservation which is most keenly felt within the space of the forest.

As the forest had always constituted the area of refuge for those who found themselves situated outside the boundaries of law and order, the very notion of there being an alternative legal status for the space occupied by the forest also meant in practice that the forest would be widely perceived as the ultimate legal outside, the traditional asylum for those cast out of the legitimate and legal status as the king’s loyal subjects:

He most nedes walk in feeld that may not in toune.
 Sire, we walk not here no harme to doo,
 But yif we mete a deer to shete therto,
 As men that bene hungry and mow no mete fynde,
 And bene harde bystad under wode lynde.

Gamelyn, ll. 672- 676.

As the outlaws themselves explain it in the romance of *Gamelyn*, the space of the forest is from the social, human perspective primarily characterised in negative terms. It remains firmly an area outside the common social space of human habitation and the legal bonds of the feudal order, which, for all their harshness, were perceived throughout the Middle Ages as offering the protective and nobilitating benefits of belonging to civilised society, a condition of life that lies at the core of human dignity, as St. Thomas Aquinas explains so eloquently at the opening of *De Regnum*.

Hence as we ascend to the more sophisticated examples of the genre of romance⁶ we will still find the forest primarily characterised through the images of privation and absence of the characteristic sights and activities in reference to which the concepts of social status and individual self-definition are forged and manifested:

Sall he no thyng see
Bot the leves of the tree
And the greves graye;
Schall he nowther take tent
To justes ne to tournament,
Bot in the wilde wodde went,
With bestes to playe.

Sir Percyvel of Galles, ll. 170-176.

Thus the Middle English tail-rhyme version of the story of young Sir Percival will primarily underscore the lack of opportunity of social education and refinement resultant on the young hero's exile in the forest. Here the natural beauties of the natural life offered by the forest environment amount to a meaningless decoration to "no thing"; the forest is unable to offer any consolation or alternative to what the protagonist misses out on by being deprived of the benefits of refined human society. Importantly, the story of Percival's subsequent social restitution is one of the universal order being reimposed, as the initial exile of the young hero and his mother is a result of an ruthless intrigue against them pursued in the wake of the death of the old Percival – the protagonist's father. Consequently the whole story treats the forest with its specificity and alternative character primarily as an unnatural counterpoint for human society. Visibly the whole import of the story is to highlight the role of the values and decorum of the aristocratic way of life and the individual's dependence on social conventions for the forging of one's identity.

Such an attitude is, needless to say, typical for the mainstream courtly romance market of the High Middle Ages, and therefore it

⁶ The present argument seeks to build upon the findings presented in the in-depth studies of the forest in medieval romance literature by Saunders (1993) and Rudd (2010).

will come as no surprise that we may encounter here a very prominent narrative motif of a self-imposed exile of a protagonist, which comes in the wake of a failure to fulfil a vital social or a personal obligation which significantly compromises the individual's perception of his role within the human community. This we may observe, for instance, in the romance of *Ywain and Gawain*, when Ywain, after failing to honour the promise to return to his liege lady after a year of adventures, falls into a state of profound depression and madness. The hero's subsequent choice of a wildwood habitat and his deranged behaviour make him lose the personal traits that bind him to the norms of human society and he effectually merges with the environment he lives in, assuming the immanent "wildness" of the forest:

Sir Ywayn, when he this gan here,
 Murned and made simpil chere;
 In sorrow than so was he stad,
 That nere for murning wex he mad.
 It was no mirth that him myght mend;
 At worth to noght ful wele he wend,
 For wa he es ful wil of wane.
 "Allas, I am myne owin bane;
 Allas," he sayd, "that I was born,
 Have I my leman thus forlorn,
 And al es for myne owen foly.
 Allas, this dole wil mak me dy."
 An evyl toke him als he stode;
 For wa he wex al wilde and wode.
 Unto the wod the way he nome;
 No man wist whore he bycome.
 Obout he welk in the forest,
 Als it wore a wilde beste;
 His men on ilka syde has soght
 Fer and nere and findes him noght.

Ywain and Gawain, ll. 1637- 1657.

It seems that an important failure to meet an obligation which constitutes part of one's social ethos has an almost automatic effect of transporting the protagonist outside the social and spatial

decorum of the human civilisation and his choice of habitat is here equally a mark of the depth of his regret as a natural choice of an environment which reflects and answers to his new identity. This typically entails not only developing the attitude of wilful abandonment, which quickly shows in the increasingly uncultivated appearance of such an unfortunate individual, but also in a progressive discarding of the norms of behaviour and conventions of social life. The idea of madness is consequently one which is strongly attached to the concept of a solitary life in the forest, which is indeed invariably the outcome of either a failure to conform to the norms of civilised society or else an intentional act of stepping outside society's perimeter of influence. All this would undoubtedly have the function of reinforcing the pun on the double meaning of the word "wood", which still proves meaningful for Shakespeare in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (II,1, 192).

This does not come as a particular surprise, for medieval sensibility treats the individual personality as a construct made of a number of psychological facets manifesting themselves in social interaction, most of which is directly dependent on one's position and function in the society.⁷ Consequently any form of prolonged separation or rejection by human society must inevitably undermine the core of the individual's mental balance. Thus becoming an inhabitant of the outside space of the forest makes one automatically assume the mantle of a rebel, only this time one becomes a rebel to reason and rationality and then ultimately to oneself. Thus, as C. J. Saunders writes: "The forest acts [...] as the boundary of a world in which logic is replaced by mystery" (1993: 141).

An extreme formulation of this motif is the appearance of the conventional character of the "wild man of the forest", or a person who, due to a prolonged life inside the forest, has assumed distinct appearance and traits of a wild animal. Otherwise known as the "woodwasa", a term derived from the Anglo-Saxon *wudewasa*, the figure of the uncivilised and solitary inhabitant of the wilderness is rooted ultimately in the classical tradition, where it finds its close equivalents in the satyr of the faun, but it is also widely present in the

⁷ See Robertson 2014: 312-331.

native mythologies of medieval Europe.⁸ The character also makes repeated appearances in English medieval literature, where creatures of this sort are mentioned as the adversaries of Sir Gawain on his way to the Green Chapel in the alliterative poem *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (ll. 721), and one of the kind becomes King Arthur's adversary in the solitary adventure the monarch undertakes after landing on the French coast during his campaign against the Roman Emperor in the alliterative *Morte Arthure* (ll. 1041-1221).

Now at the opening of *Ywain and Gawain*, Sir Colgrevance describes his meeting with an ugly creature of this sort in the course of his adventures in the wilderness:

On a lawnd, the fowlest wight
 That ever yit man saw in syght.
 He was a lathly creature,
 For fowl he was out of mesure;
 A wonder mace in hand he hade,
 And sone mi way to him I made.
 His hevyd, me thoght, was als grete
 Als of a rowncy or a nete;
 Unto his belt hang his hare,
 And efter that byheld I mare.
 To his forhede byheld I than,
 Was bradder than twa large span;
 He had eres als ane olyfant
 And was wele more than geant.
 His face was ful brade and flat;
 His nese was cutted als a cat;
 His browes war like litel buskes;
 And his tethe like bare tuskes.
 A ful grete bulge opon his bak -
 Thare was noght made withowten lac.
 His chin was fast until his brest;
 On his mace he gan him rest.

Ywain and Gawain, ll. 245-266.

⁸ For more background on the wildman figure see Saunders 1993: 70-71 and Flieger 2003: 95-99.

As we may observe, the animal traits which mark the monstrous appearance of the wildman extend well into the grotesque, as the mysterious “herdsman of wide beasts” clearly falls not only beyond civilised decorum of appearance, but also beyond any recognisably human physical form. Yet his lack of graceful appearance seems to be compensated by his intimate contact with the animals of the forest, whose speech and behaviour he appears to understand to a degree which is not accessible to the cultivated man, and also importantly he stands on the threshold of “mervailles” which are located at the heart of the forest and which also extend beyond human understanding and command.

Here we finally enter upon the crucial question of the forest as a place of manifestation of the marvellous⁹ – of a domain of reality which, in the medieval perception, lies between the mundane reality of human experience as processed through the senses and the spiritual plane of reality remaining in direct hierophantic contact with the divine. As C. J. Saunders observes: “Miracle exists on the same continuum as the marvellous and the portentous, but may be defined as God’s immediate intervention into the world” (2010: 64).

This marvellous lining of reality constitutes the ultimate fabric of the sublunary segment of Creation. It contains all the fine subtlety of the mutual dependencies existing between the intrinsic, though unseen, qualities of all the forms of existence which make up the Chain of Being. It may be penetrated either by the legitimate exertions of white magic, or “magyk naturel”, or by the unwarranted practice of the necromantic arts. This web of dependencies is the result of the uniquely balanced mixture of the four elements represented in each of the world’s creations. It is not directly accessible to human sense perception, but may be contacted and harnessed to human benefit through the intuitive faculties developed in comprehensive study of the natural world in the spirit of humility and reverence.¹⁰

Thus manifestations of the marvellous occur not uncommonly either inside the forest or at the verge of the forest, where it comes

⁹ The argument is based on the discussion of the medieval idea of the marvellous and natural magic as developed in the work of Lewis 1964: 93-102; in Saunders 2010: 117-151, 207-233. On the marvellous in the romance see also Saunders 1993: 42-43; 2020: 193-206.

¹⁰ On the Chain of Being see Tillyard 1943: 23-7.

into contact with the human habitat. Whether they are conjured up by white magicians, black magicians, elves, whose innate propensities make their recourse to all forms of magic effortless, or the more direct decrees of Providence, their function most frequently involves either testing a protagonist's character and mettle, or forging a character's self-definition. This is in itself not surprising, as it stands in relation to the idea of re-evaluation of individual personality, inherent in the motif of madness which we have discussed above. Here the recourse to the marvellous resident in the unseen fabric of reality serves to provide an enhanced status and aura to the trials undergone by the protagonist in his efforts at proving himself worthy of an enhanced status. Hence, the forest in the chivalric romance becomes a conventional setting of adventures which redefine the protagonist's personal sense of achievement and his social and ethical standing.

In this context the forest provides a setting which allows a given character to be tested without the support, or impediment, of his customary social environment. Frequently this happens in a situation when the hero's potential is somehow blocked by the nature of his social role and standing at a given moment.

A classic example of this sort of transformation¹¹ happens again in *Ywain and Gawain* when Ywain rebounds from his spell of dejection and mental derangement to embrace a new role as a champion of the oppressed. This transformation, we observe, would not have occurred without a recourse to the marvellous: the wounded and deranged Ywain is found lying under a tree by an enigmatic, if exceedingly kindly, noble lady, who is able to heal Ywain's physical as well as mental and spiritual ailments by means of a magic ointment she acquired from "Morgan the Wise". The intervention of natural magic cures Ywain of his sorry mental condition and rejuvenates

¹¹ A highly relevant study in this context is the 2013 article by R. Merkelbach tracing the motif of the forests as places of transformation in the context of the fairy tale genre. Although the adopted scope of the study does not pertain directly to the medieval tradition and, because it concentrates on a distinct genre, its specific findings concern more the transformations in the physical aspect (as is more common in the early modern tradition of the fairy tale), yet it constitutes a valuable testimony to the ubiquitous nature of the narrative motif (see Merkelbach 2013: 57-66).

him sufficiently to enable him to find a renewed sense of purpose in chivalric acts of the restitution of law and justice.

One may easily see how reminiscent this episode is of the unearthly visitation which the Queen of Fairyland makes upon the incredulous Thomas the Rhymer. Indeed if one takes a look at the romance equivalent and the original source of the ballad, i.e. the romance of *Thomas of Erceldoune*, one will be able to see how the motif functions in all its generic context, taking its place alongside other corresponding manifestations of the same narrative segment:

In a Mery Mornyng of May,
 Be huntly bankes My self alone,
 I harde the Meryll and the Jay,
 The Maner Menede of hir song,
 The wylde wode-wale song notres gay,
 Tha alle the shawys abowte hem Rong.
 But in a loning, as I lay,
 Vnder neth a seemly tre,
 I saw where a lady gay
 Cam rydyng ouer a louely le.

Thomas of Erceldoune, Lansdowne mss, ll. 27-36.

We may observe here how the already familiar elements of uncanny female visitation ushering in the marvellous blends with the setting reminiscent of the dream allegory and images of bedazzling and beguiling opulence and splendour. Another important circumstance is that the story enshrined in the romance of *Thomas of Erceldoune* connects the idea of the marvellous visitation in the forest with the reference to prophetic and transformative power intrinsic to the skills of the minstrel and the bard. As C. J. Saunders writes: "The transformative power of the supernatural, fundamental to narratives of penitence and testing, is intimately associated with the notions of monstrosity and beauty" (2010: 207).

A still different variant of the motif may be found in a fairly parallel situation in the romance of *Sir Launfal*.¹² Here we follow the story

¹² See also the discussion of the romance in Saunders 1993: 142-148; on the motif of fairy abduction in these texts see Wade 2011: 109-120.

of a knight who, having met with the mischance of falling out of favour with the Queen, slides ever deeper into the depths of social degradation and dire penury. Finally, as the dejected Launfal gravitates towards the edge of the forest to be swallowed out of social memory, we are made to witness how the harsh, but seemingly inescapable realism of the story becomes suddenly checked and reversed as the motif of the manifestation of the marvellous at the edge of the forest unveils all its life-changing potential:

He lyghte adoun, and gan abyde
 Under a fayr forest.
 And, for hete of the wedere,
 Hys mantell he feld togydere,
 And sette hym down to reste.
 Thus sat the knyght yn symplyté,
 In the schadwe under a tre,
 Ther that hym lykede beste.
 As he sat yn sorow and sore
 He sawe come out of holtes hore
 Gentyll maydenes two:

Sir Launfal, ll. 221- 231,

He fond yn the pavyloun
 The kynges doughter of Olyroun,
 Dame Tryamour that hyghte;
 Her fadyr was Kyng of Fayrye,
 Of Occient, fer and nyghe,
 A man of mochell myghte.

Sir Launfal, ll. 277-282

The escapist opulence with which the fairy-like, oriental par amour welcomes the abandoned knight would have surely been read in terms of a psychological projection of a mind at the verge of sanity if it were encountered in a text functioning within the confines of classic formal realism, but in the more charitable world of the chivalric romance it is given the benefit of reality and so, by the fairy caprice of Dame Tryamour, Launfal is able to rebuild his fortunes. Although Launfal's reputation is effectively restored by his subsequent successes in the lists and at the court, his fortunes effectively turn at

the moment when he rebounds off the marvellous reality which he encounters at the edge of the forest. His uncanny union with the elvish princess transforms not only his financial exigencies, but bestows upon the weary protagonist a sense of purpose and a feeling of self-esteem which causes him to realise all of his immanent potential, but which would have been accessible to him in the normal course of events. On the one hand, the impact of the whole story may be to perceive the forest as a sort of complimentary element which is somehow appropriated to balance out the injustice inherent in the social life of the human habitat. At the same time the story seems to stress the otherness of the forest as a spatial unit, its incompatibility with the norms of human social life which may, for all their arbitrary harshness, yet offer the paradoxical comfort of familiarity.

Another classic example of a romance which makes use of all the aforementioned elements is *Sir Orfeo*.¹³ Here the manifestation of the marvellous which takes place at the end of the forest takes a more sinister turn as the wife of Sir Orfeo is ruthlessly carried off in a typically elvish display of high-minded arrogance by the King of Fairies.¹⁴ This ushers in the familiar motif of the protagonist's loss of mental balance and abandonment of his social function in the wake of an unfulfilled social and personal obligation. Thus, as Sir Orfeo fails to protect his wife from the power and guile of the elves, we duly follow the protagonist into the woods where he resides for over ten years before his story takes a turn for the better:

He went thorow wode and hethe
And into wyldernes he gethe.
So fer he went, I sey iwys,
That he wyst not wher he was.
He that sate in boure and halle
And on hym were the purpull palle
Now in herd heth he lyghet,

¹³ For in-depth analyses of the romance see Saunders 1993: 133-142, Wade 2011: 76-80.

¹⁴ For the medieval concept of the elves and their relation to the marvellous, the present argument is based on Lewis 1964: 123-139; Wade 2011: 9-38, Hall 2007: 75-94 and Saunders 2010: 179-206.

With levys and gresse his body hydyth.
 He that had knyghtys of prise
 And before hym knelyd ladys,
 He sey not that hys herte lykyth
 Bot wyld bestys that by hym strykyth.
 Also he had castellus and tourys,
 Forestys, ryverse, frutys and flourys;
 Now, thoff it be store as frese,
 He may not make hys bed in es.
 The kyng that had grete plenté
 Of mete and drinke withouten le,
 Long he may dyge and wrote
 Or he have hys fyll of the rote.
 In somour he lyvys be the frute
 And berys that were full suete;
 In wynter may he nothing fynd
 Bot levys and grasse and of the rynd.

Sir Orfeo, ll. 239-264.

Much like in the examples we have dealt with so far, we have the forest and the wilderness characterised primarily through the imagery of dearth, desolation and absence of all the familiar social pursuits which are invariably indicatives of status, rank and social standing:

He toke his harp to him wel right
 And harped at his owen wille.
 Into alle the wode the soun gan schille,
 That alle the wilde bestes that ther beth
 For joie abouten him thai teth,
 And alle the foules that ther were
 Come and sete on ich a brere
 To here his harping a-fine -
 So miche melody was therin;
 And when he his harping lete wold,
 No best bi him abide nold.

Sir Orfeo, ll. 270- 280

Once again we may observe how crucial one's social function is for the self-definition and the sanity of the romance protagonist.

Crossing into the space of the forest is, in such a case, an act of desperation stemming from an inability to come to terms with what one assumes to be an inexcusable breach of the obligations incumbent on one's social role and personal commitment, but importantly it also possesses a cathartic, purifying function. It is very visible in the case of the romance of *Sir Orfeo* that the specificity of the forest, conceived of as a spatial environment which is invariably defined in the context of the binary opposition to human social space, allows for it to develop some complimentary characteristics which in fact facilitate the process of healing and atonement. It becomes visible that, although the temporary abandonment of one's social commitments may cause mental disbalance, it is still an important element in the process of psychological reassessment and subsequent reinvigoration. In other words, in the forest grief may be unpacked without further consideration for social decorum, mental trauma may be released and spent. In this way, the otherness of the forest allows the possibility of temporary withdrawal outside the burden of social responsibility. This conception of the function of the forest again survives into Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, where within the binary opposition between the world of nature and the city, the sorting out of excessive emotionality, for the expression of which the urban environment is too oppressive, happens in the environment of the forest, and it duly turns out to be indispensable for the final happy resolution.

Sir Orfeo himself seems to be intuitively conscious of all that as he undertakes his journey across the boundary that separates the familiar human environment from the forest. He also remains ostensibly sane in the consummation of his grief and, although his communion and rapport with the forest's wildlife designates him as embodying the stock features of the Wildman,¹⁵ the high quality of his performative skills argues for his preservation of the essential mental balance throughout his sojourn in the woods, because we are in an age when artistic creativity thankfully still remains a matter of nourishing intellectual and consequently spiritual contact with the harmony of Creation. This context of artistic expression is in its

¹⁵ Compare also Saunders 1993: 137.

turn inextricably linked with its medicinal properties. As was well known by both the ancient philosopher and the medieval scholar, art heals by the measured application of universal harmony and thus, by taking up the garb of the minstrel, Orfeo is stimulated as much by the urge to find a mode of expression for the overwhelming grief as by a deliberate submission to a self-administered treatment for the trauma he undergoes.

It is in fact the successful outcome of this whole process that not only allows Orfeo to regain his full mental balance, but also enables him to retrieve his wife from the grasp of the fairies and thus rise to the kind of heroic endeavour which he never yet achieved before, in which context we will find a parallel for Orfeo in the person of Ywain.

The point of saying all this in the context of a discussion of the motif of the forest is that there is something here in the nature of this particular spatial construct that makes it the natural place for this particular function of human aesthetic faculties to find its destined expression.

The evidence for this may be found in the fact that whenever we encounter in a literary text a description of the positively meaningful side of the specificity of the organic environment of the forest, it is the charming aural experience that will stand at the core of any such image:

“Than saw I sone a mery syght:
 Of al the fowles that er in flyght,
 Lighted so thik opon that tre,
 That bogh ne lefe none might I se.
 So merily than gon thai sing,
 That al the wode bigan to ring;
 Ful mery was the melody
 Of thaire sang and of thaire cry.
 Thare herd never man none swilk,
 Bot if ani had herd that ilk.

Ywain and Gawain, ll. 390-399

A corresponding passage appears in the alliterative *Morte Arthure*, as the king, after landing in France, rides through the forest to engage in his contest with the already-mentioned wild “giaunt”:

The frithes were flourisht with flowres full many,
 With faucons and fesauntes of ferlich hewes;
 All the fowles there flashes that flies with winges,
 For there galed the gouk on greves full loud;
 With alkine gladship they gladden themselven;
 Of the nightingale notes the noises was sweet;
 They threped with the throstels three hundreth at ones!
 That whate swowing of water and singing of birds,
 It might salve him of sore that sound was never!

Morte Arthure, ll. 923-931

Typically, in in the passages above, the song of birds reverberating through the enclosed, concentric space of the forest provides, apart from the sheer pleasure of the sweet harmonies, a soothing sensation of being admitted into the midst of an inclusive and welcoming spatial entity. What routinely accompanies such sensation is the experience of being effectively cut off from the forest's dreary surroundings:

So thik it was with leves grene,
 Might no rayn cum tharbytwene;
 And that grenes lastes ay,
 For no winter dere yt may.

Ywain and Gawain, ll. 355-358

What we in fact witness here is essentially an inversion of the earlier contrast between the liveliness and the pleasures of social life and the privations one experiences when submerged within the space of the forest. What will come to our attention at a closer examination of this fact is that one's experience of the forest will be dependent on which layer of the forest space one will come to contact with. As we have already demonstrated, the increased contact of the organic space of the forest with the sphere of the marvellous, or the immanently present layer of the natural world, goes a substantial way towards transforming the forest space into a semi-autonomous construct endowed with a determined specificity. Thus the forest stands apart from the surrounding space in a way which is distinct enough to allow for the normal sequence of seasons to be suspended inside the forest.

This phenomenon finds its confirmation in the well-known fact that the difficulty in locating the forest habitats of the fairies consists in determining at which of the coexistent parallel layers of space the entrance to the fairyland is located – this circumstance is well demonstrated by the desperate attempts of Sir Orfeo to discover the place his wife is being kept (and it is, needless to say, a very prominent point in the medieval folklore beliefs concerning elves).

Consequently it seems that the mental attitude of the protagonist, or the narrator, as expressive in the purpose of entering the woods will routinely determine the nature of the experience a character will meet with, as it determines the kind of attentiveness one projects into the forest space. In this sense the images of death and privation may well reflect the current desperate lot of the character who has fallen on bad times, but they also constitute evidence of the character's failure to make mental contact with the true nature of the environment they traverse. Importantly, such attuning to the forest's specificity invariably requires a conscious effort of attention from the character. This in itself constitutes an important testimony of the distinct nature of the gap which separates the organism of the forest from the more familiar organism of human society.

In order to observe how the above model functions in its fine points, we will further ascend the hierarchy of medieval genres to have a look at the interaction between the human world and the forest as unveiled in Geoffrey Chaucer's first dream allegory – *The Book of The Duchess*.¹⁶ Here, after a conventional dream sequence narrative frame, we learn that the dreamer has been transported into the times of the Roman Emperor Octavian to be made witness to the most emphatic kind of invasion into the forest space that the medieval human world would be in the habit of making: the royal hunt. After observing much exertion and general commotion we learn that the deer has eluded the hunting party and escaped from the pursuers via "a privy way" (l. 382). As the dreamer loiters behind after the hunt has been called off he is approached by a fawning puppy and led, through a quaint green pathway, into a place which seems as

¹⁶ On the poem in relation to the motif of the forest see also Rudd 2010: 87.

much outside the normal cycles of Nature, as it is beyond the reach of anyone entering the forest with the intention of hunting:

Hit had forgete the poverttee
 That winter, through his colde morwes,
 Had mad hit suffren, and his sorwes;
 Al was forgotten, and that was sene.
 For al the wode was waxen grene,
 Swetnesse of dewe had mad it waxe.
 Hit is no need eek for to axe
 Wher ther were many grene greves,
 Or thikke of trees, so ful of leves;
 And every tree stood by him-selve
 Fro other wel ten foot or twelve.
 So grete trees, so huge of strengthe,
 Of fourty or fifty fadme lengthe,
 Clene withoute bough or stikke,
 With croppes brode, and eek as thikke --
 They were nat an inche a-sonder --
 That hit was shadwe over-al under;
 And many an hert and many an hinde
 Was both before me and bihinde.
 Of founes, soures, bukkes, does
 Was ful the wode, and many roes,
 And many squirelles that sete
 Ful hye upon the trees, and ete,
 And in hir maner made festes.

The Book of the Duchess, ll. 387- 442

The place where the dreamer finds himself is not only one where Nature forgets the hardship of winter, but also one marked with a bountiful presence of the various animals which escape here for refuge from the pursuit of the hunters. The space where Octavian's hunt was taking place does not appear to be adjacent to this marvellous asylum in any objectively determinable way. The path connecting the two seems to be unlocked for the protagonist because he is not an active member of the hunting company and he responds to the inviting overtures of the puppy by turning his attention to the natural world around him in a way which makes him receptive to its intrinsic

charms, rather than relating to his surroundings exclusively as an environment which needs to be subjugated to satisfy norms and needs of the human world invading it. Thus the parallel space filled up with the abundance of all forms of life is not involved in any physically objective spatial continuum, neither with the human social space, nor with the mundanely realist space of the forest such as is accessible to all having the intention to cross into it. It seems that it is at this parallel layer of space, which remains in constant natural contact with the marvellous layer of the earthly reality, that the true identity of the forest as an autonomous organism is situated. Its very inaccessibility seems to function as an instinctively developed way of protecting itself against any invasion from the outside, and also one which the whole habitat guards and stimulates in a collective effort, thereby creating a most effective barrier against human intervention. Thus the ancient neighbour of human civilisation has found its marvellous way to protect itself against the expansive buoyancy of the human world.

II. The Forest in the Work of J. R. R. Tolkien

It has long been recognised that the special kind of prominence and unique status of the natural world within J. R. R. Tolkien's secondary creation cannot be exclusively accounted for by the creator's knowledge and appreciation of medieval literature. At the same time, status of its elements does not formally correspond directly to the living conditions and mode of perception dominant during what, in the primary world's long progress through history, has been referred to as the medieval period. Nevertheless, the medieval legacy certainly does lie, in its many intertwined aspects, at the heart of many of the key intellectual, philosophical and theological concepts and the applications of the literary craft which collectively make up Tolkien's unique vision of the world of Nature. Hence, before we descend deeper in the forests of Middle-earth, let us take a brief look at Arda's natural world in its overall design.

Consequently we shall again seek to approach the intricacies of the relationship between the human and the natural world as unveiled in *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* through the context of the

Legendarium. We know that the abundance of “all things that grow” has been foretold in the music of the Ainur as the Creation’s integral and vital component part and this circumstance ensures the vitality of the link it enjoys with the other elements of Ilúvatar’s *logos*, but it also makes it stand in a direct and independent relation to its Maker.

From its beginning, the natural world is consequently involved in a reciprocal bond with the sphere of the spiritual as its particular constituent elements draw for each individual Valar the benefit of care as the Valar in turn gain by the exercise of the care the due benefits of duty.¹⁷ Thus, although Yavanna appears to be the primary guardian of Arda’s living things, we would have to remember that the waters of the world are the domain of Ulmo and that the forests specifically as organic entities fall under the jurisdiction of Örome.

Because of its status as an integral part of Creation and its link to the spiritual, the natural world of Arda partakes of its fortunes in the moral struggle against which the fate of the whole of Arda unveils itself. Thus, already at the beginning of the First Age, the world of Nature shares in becoming the object of Melkor’s overwhelming rage at the beauty of Creation, which results in the destruction of the splendour of the Spring of Arda:

And though the Valar knew naught of it as yet, nonetheless the evil of Melkor and the blight of his hatred flowed out thence, and the Spring of Arda was marred. Green things fell sick and rotted, and rivers were choked with weeds and slime, and fens were made, rank and poisonous, the breeding place of flies; and forests grew dark and perilous, the haunts of fear; and beasts became monsters of horn and ivory and dyed the earth with blood.

The Silmarillion, 31.

The threat to natural life posed by the evil unleashed by Melkor consists in corrupting the vegetative forms of life from the inside, by impairing the fabric of their organic structure and in consequence

¹⁷ The present argument follows in the tradition of the studies such as Kreeft (2005), Brown (2012) and Hart/Khovacs (eds.) (2007) which have been concerned with the reflection of the Christian outlook in the work of Tolkien. In the context of the theme of Nature’s relation with the spiritual I am following Dickerson/Evans 2006: 23-36, 253-254 and Campbell 2011: 63-70; 113-115; 181-183.

making them prone to the processes of pollution and decay. This has the direct result of causing the natural organic structures, such as the forests, to develop a hostility towards the outside environment. In effect, the different sections of Creation are set against each other, completing the process of destruction. The reaction of natural entities like the forests may be seen as a natural result of the cognitive powers of the vegetative life forms, being at work in the recognition of the fact that the powers of evil and corruption have descended from the higher rungs of Creation in the wake of a breach being made in the spiritual equilibrium of Arda.

Two circumstances are of importance here. One is the fact that the evil influence which has originated at the spiritual level has no apparent difficulty in almost automatically penetrating into the realm of vegetative life. The other is that the vegetative life forms display an awareness of other, higher forms of Creation and they also exhibit an immanent, natural readiness to enter into a state of symbiosis with them, thriving best under the protection of the Valar. This is all a consequence of the underlying unity of Creation which has here its ultimate origin and source in the realm of the spirit.

The other threat to the welfare of all natural life, and vegetative life most specifically, comes from the outside and is caused by the predestined arrival of the Firstborn and the Secondborn Children of Ilúvatar. The prediction of this conflict will be the cause of the passionate contention between Yavanna and Aulë (*The Silmarillion*, 40-45) which results in the new form of spiritual protection being decreed by Manwë in recognition of the precarious status of the *olvar* which will require effective protection against the encroaches of Arda's new sapient species.¹⁸

This other threat to Arda's natural life is different inasmuch as it results only indirectly from the corruption of evil unleashed upon the secondary world by the malice of Melkor. Although the destruction brought periodically upon the *olvar* by the boisterous new sapient inhabitants of Arda will have roots in the influence of evil to which they will become susceptible, the sometimes ruthless expansion of Elves and Men is not caused by a desire to spoil the inherent beauty

¹⁸ For more on the role of Yavanna see also Dickerson/Evans 2006: 8-9.

of Creation, but only by a desire to expand their natural habitat in a competitive environment when access to land and natural resources is limited. Thus, however ill-advised and short-sighted the competitive impulse may be here, it will, for most of the time, constitute an inescapable consequence of the fact that Eä is a fallen world and one of the consequences of this fact is that the sense of natural balance between the elements of Creation is thereby compromised. Hence some of the immanent hostility encountered by Tolkien's characters as they traverse Middle-earth's forests is designed as a legitimate defensive measure and is the result of the direct link which exists in Tolkien's fiction between the world of Nature and the realm of the spiritual.

This organic connection is, needless to say, best understood and appreciated with reference to the medieval cultural context whereby all the segments of the Great Chain of Being constitute one continuum of organically related forms of existence. It is obvious that Tolkien's creative design stands more in relation to the medieval worldview, farther from the materialistic conception of natural life which has been the cornerstone of modern empirical science. The way in which the medieval model appears to be transformed in Tolkien's work seems to be towards highlighting the interdependence of the various elements of Creation, which has the effect of remodelling any narrowly conceived hierarchical conceptions while preserving the basic idea of the way in which the various forms of existence relate to their common spiritual source as defined in the classic Christian philosophy and theology.

It seems that the strong sense of an independent presence which the world of Nature exudes through the pages of Tolkien's fiction stems ultimately from the idea of the wholeness and completeness of Creation – a system of checks and balances instilled within its component parts in order to guard them in their progress towards their eschatological goal and make it easier for any of the parts, environments and creatures to avoid succumbing to the temptation of the grandeur of self-sufficiency. Hence the prominence of the motif of the forests, and especially the borders of the forests, as places of both spiritual illumination and personal trial.¹⁹

¹⁹ On this aspect see also Dickerson/Evans 2006: 147-149.

Yet the interdependence does not presuppose a lack of a hierarchical arrangement in the reciprocal relationship between the cultures and civilisations of the rational species resident in the secondary world, for it is the rational species' more direct link with the spiritual (for as we know from classical philosophy, the soul impacts upon the material bodies through the intellect) that bestows on them the relation and responsibility of stewardship towards the natural habitats they reside in. The direct, organic reciprocity of this arrangement consists in the fact that, as the civilisation's failure to keep to moral and spiritual standards will instantly result in the corruption of the natural habitat, the wholesome condition of the natural habitat the civilisation resides in serves here as a constant test of the culture's healthy spiritual condition.

The present argument seeks to follow in the footsteps of the discussion of the idea of stewardship in Tolkien as developed by M. Dickerson and J. Evans in their 2006 study *Ents, Elves, and Eriador* (37-67), while attempting to demonstrate how the organic nature of this form of the relationship between the sapient creatures and the natural world impacts on the functioning of Arda's forests perceived as integral, autonomous organisms. While in its focus on the role of the community in the relationship between Nature and the "civilised" world of the rational species inhabiting Tolkien's secondary world the argument aligns in its overall conception with the method adopted in S. Jeffers's ecocritical study *Arda Inhabited* (2014), instead of a model based on "horizontal" forms of interaction (Jeffers 2014: 19-74), we shall nevertheless pursue a line argumentation which presupposes a constant adherence to a "vertical" hierarchy of all forms of life existing in the universe of Eä.

This particular form of relationship between the natural world and the world of the rational civilisation, as perceptible from the level of the narrative texture of the individual works, will result in the relative diminishing of the role of natural organisms such as the forests in conveying their sense of the outside, and their increased importance in transmitting the idea of contact with the spiritual – which would routinely and emphatically stand close behind the sense of wonder and of dread which the characters positioned at the threshold of the forests' alternative reality will invariably experience.

It is only in the context of the correspondence of the vegetative world to the other elements of Tolkien's secondary world that we may accurately position the recurrence of the familiar motifs which we have traced in the medieval literature in the new context which they receive in Tolkien's work. Thus, as we descend deeper into the texture of the many narratives which collectively convey Tolkien's imaginative design for his secondary universe, we will enter Middle-earth's forests which, even in their heyday during Arda's First Age, function less as outside surroundings and more as safe-havens against the power of evil. This is no doubt to a large extent caused by the fact that most of the narratives from the First Age of Arda concern the Elves.

Now the transformation which the motif of the Elves undergoes in Tolkien's fiction is obviously of great importance for the role of the forests because, as we have demonstrated, the close organic bond between the forests and the medieval incarnation of the elves was a crucial element in forging the respective identities of both. As we know, the Elves as created by J. R. R. Tolkien for his fiction derive from the medieval tradition, in that we get a rational kind of increased-longevity species who preserve an organic link and bond with their forest habitat. However, the species are now awarded a place in the Chain of Being as the Firstborn Children of Ilúvatar, together with the appropriate moral faculties which the medieval elves conspicuously lacked, and, consequently, Tolkien's Elves exhibit no automatic hostility and sense of racial superiority towards humans, and no tendency to resort to the use of unwarranted magic in the unpremeditated pursuit of emotional excesses.²⁰

As a result, the new respectability which Tolkien imparted on his Elves has a direct bearing upon their traditional habitat losing much of the aura of imminent danger which constituted such a vital element in the medieval perception of the forest. This will be reinforced by the fact that the body of stories concerning the First Age as represented in the published *Silmarillion* and the assorted sources of the *Legendarium* adopt the cultural standpoint of the Elves and they duly

²⁰ On more on the role of the Elves see Dickerson/Evans 2006: 101-109, Campbell 2011: 154-162.

reflect the fact that the Firstborn are able to achieve a more profound symbiotic connection to the forest than will ever be the case with all the other sapient races inhabiting Middle-earth, whereby both the natural ecosystem of the forest and its inhabitants enter into a bond of mutual protection.

This relationship is, of course, reflected in the obvious fact that the principal Elven kingdoms and strongholds of the Noldor and the Sindar in Beleriand, like Doriath, Nargothrond or the settlements of Dorthonion, are located either inside forests or else rely on them as natural protective boundaries. Consequently for the Elven perspective the forests offer first and foremost the comforts of familiarity and refuge from the hostility encountered in natural habitats spoiled by the degrading influence of evil. Therefore the references to forests from the centuries prior to the rise in prominence of human characters, around the fourth century of the First Age, relate mostly to the forests being so intimately bound with the fortunes of the Elven civilisation that they become effectively submerged in the narrative, fulfilling for most of the time the role of a sympathetically correlated setting.

Yet the potential of the forests to become instrumental in inducing the experience of extra-sensory wonder may still be conjured up on occasion, to yield passages of stirring beauty as this one relating the first meeting between Thingol and Melian:

Elwë, lord of the Teleri, went often through the great woods to seek out Finwë his friend in the dwellings of the Noldor; and it chanced on a time that he came alone to the starlit wood of Nan Elmoth, and there suddenly he heard the song of nightingales. Then an enchantment fell on him, and he stood still; and afar off beyond the voices of the lómelindi he heard the voice of Melian, and it filled all his heart with wonder and desire. He forgot then utterly all his people and all the purposes of his mind, and following the birds under the shadow of the trees he passed deep into Nan Elmoth and was lost. But he came at last to a glade open to the stars, and there Melian stood; and out of the darkness he looked at her, and the light of Aman was in her face.

The Silmarillion, 57-58.

What we have in the passage is, needless to say, a reincarnation of the familiar medieval literary motif of a character's sudden

illumination caused by the demonstration of some wonderful reality manifesting itself at the verge of the forest, and so what the future King of Doriath undergoes here an experience parallel to what Sir Launfal or Thomas of Erceldoune were once subjected to. The unique twist comes here from the fact that it is now an Elf whose turn is to surrender before a creature representing a species of superior glamour and mystique, and this can only happen when an Elf is confronted such an angelic being as a Maia.

The importance of this passage consists in the fact that it lays a mythical blueprint for all the subsequent manifestations of this motif in Tolkien's fiction, because it introduces into Tolkien's world the idea of the forest as a place of transformation, the forging of new identity and individual trial. These motifs will later determine the lives of the characters whose fortunes implicated them in the doomed struggles of Middle-earth's Elves against the might of the apostate Vala established in the north.

Now this particular motif may already be traced back to the life story of Maeglin whose fortunes make him first renounce his destined place of honour among the Dark Elves as the heir to his father – King Eöl in the forest of Region to become a lord of the Noldor in Gondolin and to finally become, though treachery born out of a mixture of ambition and a sense of alienation, the chief engine of the city's destruction.

Although the duality between the environment of the forest and of the cultivated urban life plays an important role in conveying upon Maeglin the role of the ultimate outsider, it is indeed with the coming of Men to Middle-earth that the forests come out of the shadow to take a more active part in the consecutive narratives. In the case of Middle-earth's Secondborn living through the upheavals of the First Age the interaction with the forest habitat often takes the form of an intricate game of identity, as the characters become torn out of their native environment and left to forge a new identity in the challenges involved in repeatedly crossing the boundaries between Beleriand's forests and its other habitats. The first to undergo such a process is Barahir, who after the defeat of the Noldor in the Fourth Battle of the First Age, is forced to conduct guerrilla warfare against the victorious forces of Angband in the forests of Dorthonion:

Now Morgoth's power overshadowed the Northlands; but Barahir would not flee from Dorthonion, and remained contesting the land foot by foot with his enemies. Then Morgoth pursued his people to the death, until few remained; and all the forest of the northward slopes of that land was turned little by little into a region of such dread and dark enchantment that even the Orcs would not enter it unless need drove them, and it was called Deldúwath, and Taur-nu-Fuin, The Forest under Nightshade. The trees that grew there after the burning were black and grim, and their roots were tangled, groping in the dark like claws; and those who strayed among them became lost and blind, and were strangled or pursued to madness by phantoms of terror.

The Silmarillion, 195-196.

As the destruction of war and the poisonous influence brought about by the proximity of the mountainous pine forests of Dorthonion to Morgoth's renewed dominion in the north begins to exert a decisive influence over the natural world, Barahir is transformed into an outlaw whose desperate situation lies in the fact that, just as he cannot return to northern homeland, he is equally an alien in the forest which, in the wake of the many deprivations it underwent recently, has now developed a defensive hostility towards all manner of newcomers. It is this sense of being rejected by the forest environment that becomes in Tolkien a typically human kind of experience, setting humans clearly apart from the Elves. Consequently, crossing the boundary into the woods does not automatically entail coming under the protective aegis of the natural environment, as it will almost invariably mean for the Eldar. A stark reminder of this fact may be found when the motif of the manifestation of the marvellous at the edge of the forest is turned inside out in the scene when Barahir's unfortunate companion, Gorlim, is tempted at the edge of the southward slopes of the forests of Dorthonion with a beguiling vision of his lost domestic happiness being restored (for the more stirring version of which we shall cross over to the verse version in *The Lay of Leithian*):

Therein he peeped, and filled with doubt
he saw, as in a dreaming deep
when longing cheats the heart in sleep,
his wife beside a dying fire

lament him lost; her thin attire
and greying hair and paling cheek
of tears and loneliness did speak.

The Lay of Leithian, ll. 160-166.

It becomes very much visible that the full poignancy of this passage will be appreciated when we position it in relation to the medieval motif of the marvellous layer being exposed at the border of the forest. The beguiling black magic of the luring illusion is in its essence an inversion of the motif, as instead of a typical bedazzling display of exotic opulence, the character is tempted with a vision of soothing familiarity which the fortunes of war have put outside his reach. Instead of being given a glimpse of a deeper layer of reality, Gorlim is tortured with a phantom of the unsubstantial, unreal presence which is designed to evoke the full potential from the grief and bitter nostalgia – leading the anguished character into a violent fit of despair, which causes him to become in effect an agent of the forces of darkness and pursue a course of action which brings ruin upon himself and his companions. It seems that the effectiveness of Morgoth's snare vision is directly caused by the fact that Gorlim is unable to find comfort or consolidation in his new forest habitat, the freshly corrupted nature of which only strengthens the sense of being excluded from the only environment one may properly belong to.

In fact, Gorlim's desperate decision to betray his companions has the consequence of introducing another familiar narrative motif into the story. This time it concerns the person of young Beren, who, like Ywain or Orfeo before him, is driven into despair by a sense of unfulfilled social and personal obligation, as he tries to come to terms with not being able to come to the rescue of his father and his companions killed in an ambush prepared for them by Morgoth. As was previously the case with the protagonists of the romances, Beren withdraws deeper into the forest to wrestle with his grief and, as we may already expect, he merges enough with the forest environment to assume some characteristics of the *wodewasa*:

As fearless Beren was renowned,
as man most hardy upon ground,

while Barahir yet lived and fought;
 but sorrow now his soul had wrought
 to dark despair, and robbed his life
 of sweetness, that he longed for knife,
 or shaft, or sword, to end his pain,
 and dreaded only thralldom's chain.

The Lay of Leithian, ll. 329-336,

The woods
 that northward looked with bitter feuds
 he filled and death for Morgoth's folk;
 his comrades were the beech and oak,
 who failed him not, and many things
 with fur and fell and feathered wings;
 and many spirits, that in stone
 in mountains old and wastes alone,
 do dwell and wander, were his friends.

The Lay of Leithian, ll. 345-353.

This element becomes even more clear in the *Silmarillion* version of the tale:

Thereafter for four years more Beren wandered still upon Dorthonion, a solitary outlaw; but he became the friend of birds and beasts, and they aided him, and did not betray him, [...]

The Silmarillion, 207-208.

Thus, while the experience of solitary pain proves a bitter trial for Beren, it also preconditions him towards his later wonderful encounters with the Elven splendour as much as it opens him to a more intimate interaction with the specificity of the forest environment – which may have fostered in Beren the sensitivity necessary to make the intensity of his enchantment with the Elven princess translate itself into heroic action. Again we see how a period of madness and anguish spent inside the forest environment functions as the necessary prerequisite stage before a heroic transformation of the protagonist.

It is in this context that one may fully realise the extent to which the Elves' close symbiotic relationship with the forest environment is unlike anything a human character may achieve. This may be plainly

seen in the passages describing King Thingol's leisurely life in his forest kingdom of Doriath:

They dwelt amid Beleriand,
while Elfin power yet held the land,
in the woven woods of Doriath:
few ever thither found the path;
few ever dared the forest-eaves
to pass, or stir the listening leaves
with tongue of hounds a-hunting fleet,
with horse, or horn, or mortal feet.

The Lay of Leithian, ll. 41-54,

There Thingol in the Thousand Caves,
whose portals pale that river laves
Esgalduin that fairies call,
in many a tall and torchlit hall
a dark and hidden king did dwell,
lord of the forest and the fell;
and sharp his sword and high his helm,
the king of beech and oak and elm.

The Lay of Leithian, ll. 65-72.

It is, of course, a fact that, being farther removed from the ravages of war and enjoying the protective shield of the Girdle of Melian, Thingol has no reason to be disturbed by the prospect of an immediate exposition to the incursions of evil. Nevertheless, what becomes very specifically visible in this early poetic version of the story of Beren and Lúthien is the organic link between the elven civilisation and its forest environment. As is clear from the wording of the above passages, Thingol is here a sovereign ruler of an organism comprising all levels of Creation in this particular habitat, of which the sapient pinnacle is the society of the Sindar. Consequently he becomes the king of the forest in a totally different sense that any human ruler might hope to become by merely having the forest within the borders of his kingdom, because he appears to enjoy the natural allegiance of all the forms of existence at the various rungs of the Chain of Being. In this sense Thingol is a king of the trees because their well-being is

tributary to his own, and he in turn partakes of the dark impenetrability and seclusion of the forest environment. The king effectively embodies the unique spatial character of the natural habitat.

It is against this context that we encounter what arguably constitutes the most memorable instance of the marvellous manifesting itself at the verge of a forest in Tolkien's fiction:

Now it befell on summer night,
upon a lawn where lingering light
yet lay and faded faint and grey,
that Lúthien danced while he did play.
The chestnuts on the turf had shed
their flowering candles, white and red;
there darkling stood a silent elm
and pale beneath its shadow-helm
there glimmered faint the umbels thick
of hemlocks like a mist, and quick
the moths on pallid wings of white
with tiny eyes of fiery light
were fluttering softly, and the voles
crept out to listen from their holes;
the little owls were hushed and still;
the moon was yet behind the hill.

The Lay of Leithian, ll. 511-526.

It seems that the narrative context which emerges from the various versions of the story is crucial for discovering its deeper significance. The vision which Beren witnesses is not only a display of the full splendour of the hallowed glamour of the Tolkienian Elves unveiling before a man first brought to his knees by the harsh reality of war and freshly healed by the soothing otherness of Nature. It also constitutes an undoing of the narrative charm of Gorlim's treacherous vision of vain enchantment, whereby a broken man's desperate clinging to the ghosts of the past makes him a plaything for the forces of evil. In narrative terms what we see now is the motif of the marvellous manifestation being restored to its true function of constituting a vehicle for turning the protagonist's fortunes around, providing him with a future instead of submerging him in his attachment to the

grief of the past, and in fact the enchantment he experiences tempts, or “magics”, him out of it.

Furthermore, Beren’s cathartic experiences in the forests of Dor-thonion transform him into a man who is able to recover from, and rise above, the irrevocability of loss and face desperate challenges of endurance of spirit which are thrust upon him when the marvellous unveils before the embattled refugee at the verge of the woods of Neldoreth.

Although Beren’s fortunes prove strenuous enough, there is perhaps in the whole of Tolkien’s fiction no character more desperately torn between the wildness of the forest and hardship of social obligation than Túrin Turambar. Although the dichotomy between the forest and the social space of human and elven civilisation is not the central theme in the story, which brings in the full weight of ancient tragedy into Tolkien’s secondary world, yet in no other tale is the narrative more dependent on the pattern of division and interrelation between the forest and the human habitat as the key determining feature of the spatial imagery by means of which the story is articulated. This is no doubt due to the fact the full impact of Túrin’s tragic lot is conveyed through reference to the topos of exile, which depends on this very dichotomy in finding its expression in each version of the story.

If we now consider the story of Túrin in this context, we shall see how sensitive the narrator invariably is to this aspect of the imagery against which the story is unveiled. This is true no matter which of the numerous versions of the tale we choose to follow, but it is surely in the extended treatment the story receives in the alliterative verse version of the tale, dating to the early 1920s and the *Narn I Hin Húrin* as published in the *Unfinished Tales*, that we find that feature most emphatically present.

The narrative of Túrin invariably begins in the context of the lost Battle of Unnumbered Tears and the supposed death of Túrin’s father, Húrin. As the foreign tribe of the Easterlings invade Túrin’s native Dor-lómin in the wake of a changed balance of power in Beleriand, the young hero finds himself an exile in his own land and, being forced to abandon his household, he crosses into the forest of Brethil in search of King Thingol’s royal court in Menegroth, counting on a courteous welcome by virtue of the blood ties existing now

between the human house of Bëor and Thingol's royal line, as well as the history of friendship and service rendered to the Elves by his father. This positions Túrin in the role of the one reliving the ancient topos of a virtuous outcast sent out into the wilderness, outside the decorum of civil society, in the wake of the society's increasing oppressiveness, which also makes him follow in the footsteps of Beren.

As we may see, the idea of Túrin commencing his life's journey at the border between the forest and the socialised space of human community constituted a significant element in the description of the scene of Túrin's parting with his mother, and we may also see it echoed in the later prose version of the story:

Came a summer day when sun filtered
warm through the woodland's waving branches.
Then Morwin stood her mourning hiding
by the gate of her garth in a glade of the woods.
At the breast she mothered her babe unweaned,
and the doorpost held lest she droop for anguish.

The Lay of the Children of Húrin, ll. 146-151,

But Morwen standing on her threshold heard the echo of that cry in the wooded hills, and she clutched the past of the door so that her fingers were torn.

Narn I Hîn Húrin (Unfinished Tales), 73.

As will soon become apparent in the story, entering the space of the forest constitutes neither a mental relief nor a positive transformation of identity for Túrin and his companions, as they effectually exchange one kind of alienation for another, as is recognised by Beleg Strongbow as he greets the travellers upon their meeting in the depths of Brethil in the alliterative poem:

'Who are ye?' he asked. 'Outlaws, or maybe
hard hunted men whom hate pursueth?'

The Lay of the Children of Húrin, ll. 201-202.

Although a parallel may be drawn between the fate of Beren and of Túrin at this stage of their respective life journeys, it will soon

become apparent that the case of Túrin is a more intricate one and that much of the restlessness which contributes so much to his ultimate tragedy is the result of his failure in his desperate quest for a positive identity and a sense of belonging. This seems to be the reason behind the unhappy sequence of events which will have the effect of transforming the felicitous and privileged life Túrin enjoys at the court of Thingol, as a fosterling of the king, back into the life of a doomed castaway. Again the urge to do right by one's own identity and the legacy of one's roots makes Túrin manifest his otherness to the court of Thingol by expressing his adamant desire to cross the boundary of the protected realm of Doriath and to venture into the lands remaining under the shadow of the power of Morgoth. Although one will surely find Túrin's decision explainable by the basic instinct to identify with, and care for, the fate of the relatives whom he left behind and who remain beyond the benefit of the protective power of the girdle of Melian, it is also important as a manifestation of the basic inability of the Men of Middle-earth to identify fully with the forest as a natural habitat in the way which is so natural for the Elves, or the Ents.

In this context it is perhaps paradoxical that it is Túrin who becomes one of only two examples amid all the characters of Tolkien's fiction upon whom the specific medieval term for the wild man will be bestowed²¹ and it will, somewhat paradoxically in the medieval context, come from the mouth of an Elf:

Then Saeros rising spat blood upon the board, and spoke as best he could with a broken mouth: 'How long shall we harbour this woodwose? Who

²¹ The role of Túrin's woodwose identity has been discussed by Dimitra Fimi 1013: 43-56 in the context of the Oedipus myth. A discussion of the medieval context of the use of the term in the case of Túrin may be found in Flieger 2003: 95-105, where the clash of the medieval tradition with the modern notions of alienation is expertly discussed. Because the present argument puts special emphasis on perceiving the medieval wodewasa as a borderline figure remaining in a symbiotic contact with the world of Nature, the understanding of the concept adopted here is narrower and would not allow for the inclusion of either Aragorn, Gollum, or Frodo under the term, as is the case in Flieger's study. Likewise, we maintain here a clear distinction between the woodwose and the outlaw.

rules here tonight? The King's law is heavy upon those who hurt his lieges in the hall; and for those who draw blades there outlawry is the least doom. Outside the hall I could answer you, Woodwose!

[...]

'If the cub has a grievance, let him bring it to the King's judgement,' answered Saeros. 'But the drawing of swords here is not to be excused for any such cause. Outside the hall, if the woodwose draws on me, I shall kill him.'

Narn I Hîn Húrin (Unfinished Tales), 80.

Now, a number of interesting things must be paid attention to in this context. The first is that the use of the Modern-English adaptation of the Middle English word is unique to the extended prose version of tale of the children of Húrin to be found amid the *Unfinished Tales*, it does not appear in the early alliterative verse version, and it is similarly left out of chapter twenty one of *The Quenta Silmarillion*, where the story of Túrin is related. This makes the *Narn I Hîn Húrin* a version of events different from the others inasmuch as the verse and *The Silmarillion* version present Húrin as reacting to Orgof's, or Saeros's (as the impudent Elf would be finally known), aggressive taunt being directed ultimately at the female human inhabitants of the land of Hithlum and their alleged wild and uncivilised disposition, while in *The Unfinished Tales* the focus shift more towards the person of Húrin himself. This will be understandable in the wide context of the scene for, as the story evolved with years of gradual refinement, so its constituent elements underwent a process of mutual realignment. Thus in the alliterative version, Túrin's habitual escapades into enemy territory beyond Doriath are mostly undertaken in the company of his trusted elven friend Beleg and appear to generally enjoy the tacit blessing of King Thingol. In this context Orgof's malice seems to spring as much from a feeling of envy at the fame Túrin's daring exploits have evidently earned him as from any sentiment of genuine repulsion at the human's uncouth ways and appearance. When, in the *Narn I Hîn Húrin*, Túrin's forays into the occupied Hithlum become more solitary affairs carried out with high-minded obstinacy against the counsel of the king, the human fosterling of the royal house begins to stand out from the rest of the king's elven thanes in a measure correspondent to the degree to

which their guarded obedience to King Thingol as well as their subordination to the welfare and security of the elven community will be implicitly challenged by the young human's seemingly wayward pursuit of self-interest. Consequently the shift in the presentation of Túrin has the effect of highlighting the character's otherness and thus his association with the forest as the spatial outside becomes more forceful and, in a way, justifies the use of the term "woodwose" in the context of a malicious jibe.

The important thing here is that, when Saeros insult is voiced against Túrin in the royal halls of King Thingol, the ill-fated son of Húrin does not yet exemplify any of the key features of the *wodewasa* for, despite his possible deficiencies in social refinement and personal hygiene, he never yet abandons the social obligation which determines his links with the civilised community. On the contrary, it is Túrin's determined obstinacy in seeking to extend protection to his beleaguered homeland which remains the domain of the enemy that is his expression of the hero's obsessive need to fulfil his social obligation. Although the headstrong manner in which this urge is expressed marks him out as an outcast within King Thingol's court, the social bond is never compromised until the killing of Saeros causes Túrin to forgo the safety of King Thingol's enchanted halls and go into a self-imposed exile, whereby he begins his long and complex journey of identity where the spectre of the *wodewasa* never ceases to haunt the young man's fortunes. Thus in some important way, the Elf's unguarded words acquire the force of a spell, casting the person they were directed at into the role they themselves formulate for him.

Although the precise circumstances surrounding the final turn of events in Menegroth differ significantly between the respective versions, for in the alliterative poem the confrontation between the Túrin and Orgof takes place in the presence of the king, there can be no doubt that the effect of the whole affair is that, however blatant and unbecoming has been the provocation, Túrin's actions amount to a breach of his basic social obligation towards King Thingol, for he breaks the king's peace and kills one of his fellow thanes. Thus it is again the inability to fulfil a personality-defining social obligation which becomes the decisive force behind a character's transformation

into a broken creature of the outside, choosing to adopt the forest as his place of exile.

What makes Túrin's case a trifle more complex than the basic standardised template which we have abstracted out of Middle-English romance is the fact that at the origins of his social downfall lies a conflict of obligations, which makes the symbolic connotations of elements of the spatial layout of the fictional world subject to the various characters' internal perception and thus effectively relative. Thus, for Túrin, his sojourn at the court of King Thingol is already an exile into the outside of the forest which becomes for him the measure of his inability to protect the loved ones he left behind, and as such it constitutes for the character a failure of social obligation which he desperately seeks to rectify.

While discussing how the motif of the forest functions in the principal versions of the tale of Túrin Turambar, one cannot but devote special attention to the diachronic context of the relationship between the principal texts where the story is unveiled. In fact, if one chooses to look at the way the basic components of the imagery relate to each other in the particular versions as well as the way in which the traditions of genre and narrative technique are employed in the narratives themselves, one might see how the motif of the forest, and of the natural world as a whole, becomes transformed in the wake of the author's evolving approach to the construction of the imagery in the narrative.

Thus, as the tale takes shape in the alliterative poem, the narrator perceives the space of the forest, and the world of nature in general, as a relatively passive and implicitly neutral element, the characteristics of which are effectively determined by the bipolarity of the universal spiritual conflict in which the secondary world is engulfed in the First Age of Arda. Consequently, the forest's function as an autonomous entity possessing a determinate aura which may inflict a specific effect on the characters of the story is relatively less prominent. Rather, the forest remains here subject to the direct influence of the conflicting spiritual powers and influences which are the result of the ethical and spiritual conflict which engulfs the Middle-earth of the First Age. Thus, while the hospitable or hostile character of the forests of Middle-earth which Túrin, or Beleg, traverse in

the course of the story take the form of an intensely communicated “attitude” or “stance” which the surrounding environment adopts as the characters penetrate its various sections, this attitude is directly determined by the extent to which the various parts of the forests remain under the dominance of respective sides in the ethical conflict. Thus, in the course of the narrative, one encounters a very immediate, palpable presence of elven magic, chiefly that produced by Melian, extending over some sections of the forests surrounding Doriath, and this presence becomes the decisive force in transforming the innate hostility of the natural forests, wounded by the presence of evil, into more hospitable surroundings. This underlying opposition is communicated in the imagery through the interplay of the motifs of light and darkness. Wherever the positive influence fails to penetrate the space of the forest, the sense of darkness and gloom which immediately engulfs the observer becomes the testimony to, and the measure of, the particular part of the forest environment falling under the influence of the powers of evil.

Thus, as Beleg ventures north of Doriath, into what, in Beren’s time, used to be the forests of Dorthonion, the perception of forest space is perceptibly dominated by the sense of a constant interaction between the opposing spiritual forces:

Never-dawning night was netted clinging
in the black branches of the beetling trees;
oppressed by pungent pinewood’s odours,
and drowsed with dreams as the darkness thickened,
he strayed steerless. The stars were hid,
and the moon mantled. There magic foundered
in the gathering glooms, there goblins even
(whose deep eyes drill the darkest shadows)
bewildered wandered, who the way forsook
to grope in the glades, there greyly loomed
of girth unguessed in growth of ages
the topless trunks of trees enchanted.
That fathomless fold by folk of Elfland
is Taur-na-Fuin, the Trackless Forest
of Deadly Nightshade, dreadly named.

The Lay of the Children of Húrin, ll. 754-767.

Such overt references to the wholesome power of the “white magic” of Melian, as well as those to the “magic of Morgoth” (later in l. 1267) may be seen, on the most basic level, as a testimony to the indebtedness of Tolkien’s literary apparatus to the medieval heritage, in the sense that it is a feature of a narrative technique which is still founded on elements of a reverent pastiche. Nevertheless, it appears to involve the forest in the universal spiritual conflict with far greater intensity than had ever been the case in the medieval literary tradition, and this happens despite the fact that the understanding of the meaning and function of magic in the secondary world is, in Tolkien’s fiction, painstakingly recreated from the medieval cognitive and cultural models, as we have demonstrated above. It seems that the reason for that may be twofold. First, it is still worth remembering that throughout the narratives relating to the First Age of Arda, the overall perspective adopted constantly reflects the perspective of the civilisation of the Elves, whereby the forest is not automatically perceived as the outside, but in fact, for the most time, it functions as the protective inside. Consequently, the prospective status of the forest becomes an element over which the respective sides representing the immanent goodness of Creation and its destructive corruption will inevitably clash.

Secondly, as we have indicated above, in Tolkien’s fiction the organic links between the various levels of Creation take the form of a more symbiotic, non-hierarchical system of mutual balance. Hence the various organisms of the natural world are more involved in the reciprocal relationship with the “higher”, rational forms of Creation, and consequently become more directly and more intensely involved in the immediacy of the spiritual conflict. The important thing is that, while this state of things will continue in Tolkien’s fiction as it reaches its full maturity, the narrative techniques developed in the course of later narratives will enable the self-same philosophy to be conveyed in a form through which it may be expressed more subtly.

It is visible that, in this early form of the story, the overtness keeps the narrative tied to the sort of objective determinism which leaves little room for the tragedy of personal choice to be fully unveiled. It is therefore important that, in the later retelling of the narrative, where the story proceeds beyond the unfortunate killing of Beleg, the marvellous, magical quality of the forest’s space is evoked in a less

explicit and a more subtle way, whereby the intensity of the mind-transforming potential of the forest as a spatial entity is rendered through a reference to the interaction between the given character's individual psychological impulse and the sense of otherness of the forest's setting, which amplifies the resulting experience into the intensity of the marvellous. In this latter way the adopted mode of narration will have the actual function of making the forest seem a more autonomous spatial construct, capable of possessing its own intrinsic qualities, but these will only impact on the individual's behaviour when they interact with the forest on the level of personal experience.

This line of argumentation will bring us in contact with the argument developed by Verlyn Flieger in her 2017 article *The Forests and the Trees* (131-133), where the analysis traces Tolkien's creative evolution in the direction of expressing the subjective perception of his characters through reference to the intrinsic operations of the elements of nature, rather than by recourse to any overly supernatural phenomena. Developing a parallel reasoning, we see here evidence of a progressive reformulation of the way in which Nature is compromised by the impact of evil. It seems that in Tolkien's more mature work the more active, autonomous role ascribed to the role of Nature makes the narrative less reliant on overt references to non-realistic elements, such as the operation of magic, for the expression of the characters' impression of their environment.

Thus, in the later versions of the story, the overt references to magic will give way to descriptions of a psychological transformations, as will happen for instance when, in *Narn I Hîn Húrin*, Túrin steps into the traditional role of the outlaw:

Therefore Turin abode with the outlaws, since the company of any men made the hardship of the wild more easy to endure; and because he wished to live and could not be ever at strife with them, he did little to restrain their evil deeds. Thus he soon became hardened to a mean and often cruel life, and yet at times pity and disgust would wake in him, and then he was perilous in his anger. In this evil and dangerous way Turin lived to that year's end and through the need and hunger of winter, until stirring came and then a fair spring.

As we have seen before, the weakening of the individual's moral sensitivity is a standard mental symptom resulting from the lessening of the immediate impact of the civilised society upon a character remaining in the forest, and we are still aware that this particular, degrading influence of the woods of Teiglin is a direct result of the influence of evil spreading through the neighbouring forests. For Túrin, remaining in an internal conflict between a sense of injured pride, the despair of an unfulfilled obligation, and the realities of his own limited powers and possibilities, the spell he spends in the company of outlaws is effectively most expressive of his present state of physical and mental entrapment, of being cast out beyond the possibility of taking meaningful decisions. In order to convey all this, the narrating voice makes no recourse here to direct references to the interplay of natural magic and its dark counterpart, but rather involves the character in a setting which reflects this dichotomy in how it interacts with a particular character's psyche – here the influence of the setting is still an objective thing, but the degree in which the character succumbs to it is still a matter of individual powers, and ultimately the result of personal choice.

Importantly, the transition between the two ways in which the imagery functions across the different renditions of the story of Túrin, as it evolved over the years of effort put into its refinement, does not diminish the degree to which the character of the forest setting is determined by the medieval models and precedents, but it is rather a result of the adoption of a more refined literary technique, whereby the underlying philosophy behind the relationship of the various elements of the setting and imagery are conveyed with ever greater sensitivity and skill.

Despite all these differences in the presentation of the story each of the respective versions is still to a defined degree based on the adaptation and transformation of narrative motifs which descend to us from the literary models developed within the context of medieval literature. One such motif, which plays an absolutely crucial significance in the tragic story of the children of Húrin, is that involving the forest environment becoming a catalyst for madness and a place where those who have succumbed to it may undergo a healing process.

Whenever the segment of the tale of Túrin dealing with the aftermath of his tragic, erroneous killing of Beleg in the forest of Taur-na-Fuin reaches something near a finalised version, the account of the subsequent post-traumatic coma experienced by the ill-fated hero is invariably part of the narrative and it is fairly straightforward to discern in this episode a direct echo of parallel experiences in the stories of Sir Ywain and Sir Orfeo:

Thence he wandered witless without wish or purpose;
 but for Flinding the faithful he had fared to death,
 or been lost in the lands of lurking evil.
 Renewed in that Gnome of Nargothrond
 was heart and valour by hatred wakened,
 that he guarded and guided his grim comrade;
 with the light of his lamp he lit their ways,
 and they hid by day to hasten by night,
 by darkness shrouded or dim vapours.
 (...)

The tale tells not of their travel weary,
 how roamed their road by the rim of the forest,
 whose beetling branches, black o'erhanging,
 did greedy grope with gloomy malice
 to ensnare their souls in silent darkness.

The Lay of the Children of Húrin, ll. 1422-1435,

Then Túrin stood stonestill and silent, staring on that dreadful death, knowing what he had done; and so terrible was his face, lit by the lightning that flickered all about them, that Gwindor cowered down upon the ground and dared not raise his eyes. (...)

Never once as they wandered together on long and grievous paths did Turin speak, and he walked as one without wish or purpose, while the year waned and winter drew on over the northern lands. But Gwindor was ever beside him to guard him and guide him; and thus they passed westward over Sirion and came at length to the Beautiful Mere and Eithel Ivrin, the springs whence Narog rose beneath the Mountains of Shadow.

The Silmarillion, 269-271,
 (or *Narn I Hîn Húrin* from
The Children of Húrin), 155-156.

The event which triggers the state of intensely depressive trance to which Túrin succumbs here may arguably be viewed in two ways. First it would obviously classify as an example of a broken social obligation (in this case of friendship and of mutual trust and protection) which, as we have seen, has the routine consequence of evoking similar reactions. Much more than that, however, the killing of Beleg constitutes the turning point in the whole story of Túrin, as it marks the first of a number of consecutive instances when the curse laid by Morgoth on the protagonist's fortunes becomes an engine through which harm is brought upon not just Túrin himself, but also those closest to him. Furthermore, the whole experience seems to again raise the spectre of Túrin's loss of identity and his unconscious descent into the woodwose he has been cursed to become, for in his wild, instinctive reaction to the stealthy approach of Beleg he may be assumed to exhibit some of that identity.

Another vital thing in this context is that we may choose here to view Túrin's unhappy mistake in a still more directly symbolic way, as an instance of a life-changing trial of identity, which, as we have demonstrated above, was a recurring motif in medieval romance. Then the whole event may be taken to mark the moment of a decisive and irrevocable disintegration of Túrin's "heroic" identity, as the hero succumbs, whether by virtue of the "magic of Morgoth" or more mundane considerations of extreme physical exhaustion and fatigue, to the state of bewilderment and lack of orientation that is the ever-present danger posed by the forest environment in the literary tradition we have been seeking to trace here in Tolkien's work. The fact that Túrin abandons his proper name after the traumatic event is a further testimony to the sheer force with which his identity was shaken by his killing of his own most faithful companion and champion.

Túrin's madness is thus finally put to rest by virtue of the cleansing power of a spring guarded from the universal pollution by the special care of Ulmo, and we should note here that this motif will find its most famous counterpart in Dante partaking of the healing power of the river of Lethe before entering the earthly paradise at the top of the mountain of Purgatory in the *Divine Comedy*. Also the motif of augmenting the recuperative process by resorting to the creation of music (as Túrin does by composing a song to commemorate

Beleg) has its direct parallel in romances such as *Sir Orfeo* and *Thomas of Erceldoune*.

Yet it is the mark and measure of Túrin's doomed destiny that his dalliance with the spectre of the woodwose is never truly over, for following the tale we will soon encounter the narrative pattern of a tragic failure to meet a social and personal obligation followed by a period where the Húrin's unfortunate son will once again assume the identity of a "wildman". Thus after realising that he has been tricked by Glaurung's mind-dimming rhetoric into abandoning Finduilas and others who were in dire need of his protection after the fall of Nargothrond, we see Túrin descend again into the identity which Saeros once maliciously bestowed on him. This is perhaps most explicitly conveyed in *The Silmarillion* rendering of the story:

Now Túrin coming down from Ered Wethrin sought for Finduilas in vain, roaming the woods beneath the mountains, wild and wary as a beast; and he waylaid all the roads that went north to the Pass of Sirion (...) He named himself Wildman of the Woods, and they besought him to come and dwell with them; but he said that he had an errand yet unachieved, to seek Finduilas, Orodreth's daughter of Nargothrond.

The Silmarillion, 281.

Although Túrin does not withdraw this time beyond the sense of social obligation, for he still harbours hope of being reunited with Finduilas, it nevertheless seems that each consecutive tragic turn of events has the effect of chopping away one more piece of identity from the doomed hero, and as Túrin becomes duly Mormegil, Turambar, or simply the "wildman", he seems to instinctively embrace the forest habitat to validate and justify each subsequent identity in which he seeks to hide after failing in the previous one. It seems that the apparent "willingness" of the almost benignant forest environment to provide a setting where this mental realignment may repeatedly occur may be perceived as a symptom of its underlying actual hostility, for it is through the side effects of Túrin's repeated transformations of identity that the ultimate tragedy of the children of Húrin is finally brought about. While the hostility may in its essence be an outcome of the natural world's pollution and perversion

by the forces of evil, in the context of this tale at least, the true tragic paradox is that it is this very hostility that becomes a tool for the evil powers to inflict further damage.

Thus, although Túrin effectively recuperates from his temporary loss of identity, the whole episode seems to foreshadow what arguably becomes the most tragic instance of loss of memory and identity amid all the entangled stories of the human and elven civilisations during the First Age of Arda – which is surely Nienor’s tragic descent into madness and amnesia following her encounter with Glaurung the dragon.

Although the meeting with Glaurung does not take place in the forest, but rather in a common thoroughfare, Nienor is almost instantly transposed into forest surroundings by the narrator. As the nature of the forest environment essentially corresponds to, and amplifies, the character’s loss of space orientation and disintegration of identity, so Nienor seems to almost instinctively gravitate towards the forest setting:

But as for Nienor, she ran on into the wood, hearing the shouts of pursuit come behind; and her clothing she tore off, casting away her garments as she fled, until she went naked; and all that day still she ran, as a beast that is hunted to heart-bursting, and dare not stay or draw breath. But at evening suddenly her madness passed. She stood still a moment as in wonder, and then, in a swoon of utter weariness, she fell as one stricken down into a deep brake of fern. And there amid the old bracken and the swift fronds of spring she lay and slept, heedless of all.

In the morning she woke, and rejoiced in the light as one first called to life; and all things that she saw seemed to her new and strange, and she had no names for them. For behind her lay only an empty darkness, through which came no memory of anything she had ever known, nor any echo of any word. A shadow of fear only she remembered, and so she was wary, and sought ever for hidings: she would climb into trees to slip into thickets, swift as squirrel or fox, if any sound or shadow frightened her; and thence she would peer long through the leaves before she went on again.

Narn I Hîn Húrin (Unfinished Tales), 121.

It appears that the essence of the tragedy of the incestuous relationship of Túrin and Nienor is that Túrin’s more conscious and,

for the most part self-imposed, loss of identity becomes, by virtue of a malicious turn of fortune, the main agent in bringing destruction upon himself and his beloved sister. Thus instead of being the traditional mental refuge, or a prelude to mental healing, the disintegration of identity becomes a way in which Túrin and Nienor mutually destroy each other by means of the strength of their reciprocal affection. In this way the function of the traditional character of the forest setting becomes, for Tolkien, an instrument of realigning the romance-derived narrative motifs, taking them beyond their native genre into the reality of the myth and the classical tragedy.

In recapitulation it may be said that, in the great tales of the *Legendarium* which concern the First Age of Arda, the function of the forest in the imagery of the narratives seems to be to epitomise the reality of the struggle of the two respective species of the Children of Ilúvatar for an earthly refuge from the evil and decay, in a world where the link between the material and the spiritual has always been stronger than is the case in the primary universe, and where the memory of an earthly habitat where Eru's material creatures were able to walk in the presence of spirits is still fresh, tangible and painful to recollect.

In such a world, the forests are places in relation to which the differing nature, heritage and destiny of the Elves and of Men is most starkly perceptible. It appears that for the Elves the forests are not conceived of as the outside, but rather become jealously guarded centres of refuge and solace.²² As such they frequently beguile even the most discerning of the Elven elite into an attitude of almost paranoid isolationism, crippling attachment to the products of material culture, lack of interest in more global concerns and persistent delusions about one's own strength and the stability of the worldly order. All this seems to be the outcome of the fact that, for the Elves of Middle-earth's First Age, the forest, and the natural world in general, is both an intimate natural habitat invariably evoking a genuine senses of attachment, but also a shadow of the earthly paradise of Valinor and also ultimately a remainder of the stubborn wilfulness which once led the Elven prince to abandon the immortal realms.

²² Compare here Campbell 2011: 184-193.

For the Men of Middle-earth, the forest seems to function primarily as a symbol of the more precarious character of the link with the world of Nature, which it is the lot of the species to enjoy. It may be said that any new contact with the forest environment provides an opportunity for the Secondborn to realise that they were not meant to experience the same organic link with the world of Nature which is the normal condition of the Elves. Thus, even though the woods of the First Age cover most of the territory of the West and North Beleriand which is where the majority of the tales take place, for the human population the forests are invariably thought of as the outside, as spaces to be traversed rather than to be submerged into. The strong and visible presence of motifs and elements developed in the context of the idea of the forest in medieval literature, which we have hopefully demonstrated, is used in the course of key *Legendarium* narratives to express this underlying philosophy on which Tolkien's secondary world is made to operate.

As we now pass on to the later history of Arda, we shall be concerned with different forests and, even more importantly, with a different context of genre and literary conventions. Another vital thing is that we shall also be dealing with a newly remade world in which the separation between the world of the spirit and that of matter becomes progressively more emphatic and indiscriminate than was the case during the First Age.

Thus on the continent of Middle-earth, as it emerges in its new shape in the wake of the Great Battle which ends the estrangement and exile of Middle-earth's Elves, we shall move to the west, beyond the ridge of the Misty Mountains, to the forest of Mirkwood:

Now of old the name of that forest was Greenwood the Great, and its wide halls and aisles were the haunt of many beasts and of birds of bright song; and there was the realm of King Thranduil under the oak and the beech. But after many years, when well nigh a third of that age of the world had passed, a darkness crept slowly through the wood from the southward, and fear walked there in shadowy glades; fell beasts came hunting, and cruel and evil creatures laid there their snares.

Then the name of the forest was changed and Mirkwood it was called, for the nightshade lay deep there, and few dared to pass through, save only in the north where Thranduil's people still held the evil at bay. Whence it

came few could tell, and it was long ere even the Wise could discover it. It was the Shadow of Sauron and the sign of his return. For coming out of the wastes of the East he took up his abode in the south of the forest, and slowly he grew and took shape there again; in a dark hill he made his dwelling and wrought there his sorcery, and all folk feared the Sorcerer of Dol Guldur, and yet they knew not at first how great was their peril.

The Silmarillion, 384-385.

The importance of this *Silmarillion* passage is that it reiterates the notions of the strong symbiotic dependence of all the levels of Creation, which is the persistent trait of Tolkien's secondary world. As we have said before, the immediate nature of the bond between the various forms of Creation leaves the world of nature more immediately vulnerable to the influence of evil than is the case in the primary world. The progressive descent of the Greenwood forest into the state of sullen hostility is thus paradoxically a proof of its sapient character and "spiritual" potential. It is for this reason that the possibilities for the forest environment to be used by the powers of evil are quite far reaching and this circumstance will be the decisive factor determining the function of the forest in the narratives of the Third Age.²³

As the Elven perspectives on the forest will be henceforth of less significance for determining the perspective of the narrator, the forest will offer less of the real or deluding perspective of protection from the encroachments of evil, and will function more in the role of the outside of the characters' native habitat. Because the chief narratives of the Third Age, i.e. *The Hobbit*, and *The Lord of the Rings*, are dominated by the quest pattern,²⁴ the forest will be here more prominent in its roles as a finite spatial unit to be traversed as a stage in a quest journey and less as a concentric area of space where the otherness, usually represented as the marvellous, increases as we draw near its centre. In fact, this opposition will become an important element in the perception of the forest's intrinsic role in the narrative.

²³ On Mirkwood in the context of the decline of the natural world, see also Dickerson/Evans 2006: 132-136.

²⁴ In the case of Beren and Lúthien the motif of the quest functions side by side with other narrative patterns and thus its role is relatively less prominent.

This is to a significant degree determined by the difference between the modern and the medieval perception of space, because the layout and character of the forest vis-à-vis the neighbouring spatial units is, in medieval cognition, conceived of as coexistent adjacent concentrically expanding entities which create the space that they occupy by filling it up.²⁵ The perceptual effect thus created is somewhat akin to the effect created upon the surface of water by the formation of a number of concentric circles. Such a comparison is useful also because by consecutively adding new circles we may simulate the operation of the medieval cognitive mode in the diachronic aspect, i.e. we can observe how the shifting of attention changes the respective relationship of the spatial units, as the ones attracting attention will expand against the others, which is the way human cognition will work without recourse to the idea of individual perspective. In this mode of space perception, there is no pre-existent mental template with determined coordinates and dimensions functioning as a receptacle for the perceived objects, which represents the modern way in which spatial cognition works.

Having discussed all of the above, we are now prepared to embark upon this chapter's examination of J. R. R. Tolkien's literary texts in which the role of the spatial template increases – namely *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*. Both are quest narratives, mapped out against a universal spatial design encompassing the whole of the secondary world, providing a framework for the unveiling of the consecutive development of the narrative. Another reason for the increased importance of modern space perception in these texts is that their relative connection with the modern novelistic literary conventions is comparatively greater than is the case with the stories comprised in the *Legendarium*, and consequently the increased reliance on narrative techniques such as internal focalisation transforms the way in which spatial units such as the forest will be perceived and described. This will be the underlying reason for the general tendency to view the spatial construct of the forest as an element in the progression of the quest, a specific state on a journey rather

²⁵ The methodology here based on the work of Guriewicz (1973) and Zumthor (1993) – see the theoretical introduction to the next chapter.

than a venture into a self-contained concentric entity created around some impenetrable core. At the same time it becomes apparent that the continued recourse to the medieval tradition and genre conventions is still an important characteristic of the two narratives, although this time the medieval heritage connected with genres such as the romance or the dream allegory is made to function in relation with and sometimes in the context of the literary conventions of the classical epic.

In the context of the above discussion, we shall first examine how the element of the forest functions in *The Hobbit*. The thrust of the following argument is based on the assumption that the underlying quest pattern in the narrative in *The Hobbit* is essentially a composite mixture of the conventions of the fairy tale and the mock epic. In this way *The Hobbit* reflects, to a significant degree, the classical epic tradition, while the mode in which the narrative is composed is mock-heroic.²⁶ The mechanism by virtue of which the relation of the two potentially distinct traditions is made to converge in *The Hobbit* consists in the typical fairy tale characters being sucked into a potentially heroic narrative pattern. The resulting incongruity, then, is the foundation of the comic effect the narrative is designed to produce. Thus, the introduction of Bilbo as the central character is here meant to reflect the concept of a protagonist typical for the traditional fairy tale.²⁷ Now, the underprivileged, innocently naïve protagonist of the standard folk tale, who is usually subject to the uncanny fortune of blundering upon an adventure which is neither his seeking to undertake, nor his desire to succeed in, possesses no exceptional features of character or disposition, which would have made him outstanding in any recognisably heroic way. If this sort of character is sent off on a quest that unfolds amid a wealth of inter- and metatextual references which situate it in the heroic literary tradition, the inevitable clash of registers produces a comic effect. Since this comic effect results from a juxtaposition of the grandeur of the heroic tradition with the lowly familiarity of the characters who have to measure themselves against it, the resulting effect is that of a mock-heroic narrative.

²⁶ I am indebted here to the argument in M. Błaszkiwicz 2003: 97-98.

²⁷ For the classic analysis of this aspect see Propp 1968: 25-65.

The role of the forest is, therefore, subordinated to this narrative design. It is undeniably true that the topos of the dark forest lies behind a familiar narrative motif typical of the traditional fairy tale.²⁸ Yet, in a text where motifs typical of the fairy tale are elevated to come into contact with the epic quest narrative, an adventure in the forest is made to fulfil the role of a *katabasis*. Now the function of the motif of the epic hero's descent to the underworld incorporates a number of important elements and motifs and their relative prominence depends on the cultural tradition from which the various incarnations of the motif descend to us. The role of this particular stage in the protagonist's epic journey is to relate the quest to the legacy of the past and to anchor it against the heritage of the culture within which the quest takes place. Moreover, the confrontation with the ultimate otherness of the underworld is a necessary prerequisite stage in testing the protagonist's heroic mettle, and as such it constitutes a mandatory episode in the progression of the quest. No less important is the motif of *nekyia*, or an encounter with the spirits of the dead, whose knowledge of the past and the future extends far beyond the ordinary human scope and whose verdict on the propitious course of future action frequently has for the protagonist the full force of an oracle.²⁹

Finally, the tradition of the Christian *katabasis*, which has its ultimate origins in the theological and doctrinal legacy of the Harrowing of Hell, places special emphasis on the element of lasting transformation of the underworld, which the presence of the protagonist is able to exert by the sheer force of the new universal order his quest is destined to introduce.

We shall argue henceforth that the medieval motifs and conventions which appear in *The Hobbit* in the context of the company of Bilbo and the dwarfs passing through the forest of Mirkwood on their way to the top of the Lonely Mountain, which is the ultimate destination of the mock-heroic quest, are used to reinforce this section of the narrative in its role of fulfilling role of *katabasis*, and consequently of reinforcing the meta- and intertextual interplay with

²⁸ See Propp 2003: 49-116.

²⁹ For the background on the two concepts see Dova 2014: 1-42.

the heroic quest tradition which constitutes the overriding narrative pattern in *The Hobbit*. In this context the forest of the fairy tale, with its clear borderline function which implies initiation and ceremonial transition, fits in amiably with the traditional role that the motif of *katabasis* fulfils within the epic quest narrative.

Importantly, the journey through Mirkwood is parallel in this particular narrative role by the episode of the company's passage through the underground halls of the Goblin king and Bilbo's confrontation with Gollum. Consequently, if we were to concentrate on the analysis of the full significance of Tolkien's use the motif of *katabasis* in the narrative design of *The Hobbit*, we would have to pay equal attention to both segments of the story as the particular episodes are to a significant degree complementary. It is only because we focus here on a specific element in the imagery of the narrative that we shall devote our attention solely to the medieval echoes reverberating through the katabatic experience of the Mirkwood forest.

Let us this begin by entering the "underworld" of the forest of Mirkwood as focalised by the individual perception of Bilbo and the dwarves:

They walked in single file. The entrance to the path was like a sort of arch leading into a gloomy tunnel made by two great trees that leant together, too old and strangled with ivy and hung with lichen to bear more than a few blackened leaves. The path itself was narrow and wound in and out among the trunks. Soon the light at the gate was like a little bright hole far behind, and the quiet was so deep that their feet seemed to thump along while all the trees leaned over them and listened. As their eyes became used to the dimness they could see a little way to either side in a sort of darkened green glimmer.

(...)

There were queer noises too, grunts, scufflings, and hurryings in the undergrowth, and among the leaves that lay piled endlessly thick in places on the forest-floor; but what made the noises he could not see. The nastiest things they saw were the cobwebs: dark dense cobwebs with threads extraordinarily thick, often stretched from tree to tree, or tangled in the lower branches on either side of them. There were none stretched across the path, but whether because some magic kept it clear, or for what other reason they could not guess. It was not long before they grew to hate the

forest as heartily as they had hated the tunnels of the goblins, and it seemed to offer even less hope of any ending.

The Hobbit, 132-133.

The epic *katabasis* is, by its nature, primarily a trial of diversion, it constitutes a necessary stage in the epic quest, but is also one posing a most immediate danger of detraction from the basic path of the quest. This is because the protagonist invariably steps here into a territory positioned outside the coordinates of general space, which constitute the core of his spatial orientation during his journey. Upon entering the forest of Mirkwood, the traveller enters into a spatial limbo where they not only lose the sense of whether their itinerary corresponds to the main course of their epic journey, but are also deprived of the solace of being able to measure the distance they cover, or indeed being sure they are still following the correct path.

The darkness in which the space of the forest is submerged offers a challenge as much to the physical abilities of the travellers as to their morale and continued sense of purpose, and this is due to the fact that it is as much a physical factor as one whose significance is also heavily symbolic. As the forest has long been exposed to the corrupting influence of the evil descending upon it from the higher layers of Creation, the natural organism of Mirkwood has developed an instinctive tendency to oppose the penetration of any life forms other than those already native to it. The density of the protective growth which has developed around the path leading through it is paradoxically augmented by those elements of its ecosystem whose abnormal abundance is in itself the result of the hostile influences penetrating into the natural hierarchy of the forest's life forms. The important thing here is that the intense, impenetrable darkness which envelops anyone wishing to penetrate deeper into its territory may have its immediate effect as a protective measure, by means of which the forests seeks to discourage any forays inside it, but in its essence the excessive darkness is a sign of the forest's ecosystem being out of balance. As the spiders' webs prevent light from penetrating the ground level, they succeed in keeping the whole ecosystem in a state in which new growth is artificially suspended or slowed, which has the effect of the forest's natural process of renewal being stifled.

As a consequence the forest of Mirkwood is aging unnaturally, with old trees nearing the end of their natural life-span dominating the ecosystem, and because the symbiosis between the mature trees and the saplings is a necessary prerequisite to the welfare of both, some of the forest's ill-favoured malice can be explained by the absence of this element from the natural balance of life in what once was Greenwood the Great. Thus the Mirkwood forest is made an instrument of evil in a way which causes corruption and decay at the very core of its vegetative processes. Behind the hostility with which it welcomes all newcomers is the hopelessness of a protracted sickness. Because, as we have said before, the natural world of Tolkien's secondary world seems to enjoy a more immediate, reciprocal link with the spiritual than is allowed in the primary world by the framework of empirical science, the freezing of the natural process of growth and natural succession of the younger generations has also the effect of submerging the organism of the forest ever deeper in the darkness of the unhappy past as it makes any possibility of rejuvenation impossible. The forest of Mirkwood is thus steeped in the past, in the memory of its former greatness and regret of its subsequent decay. Its tragedy is that it is unable to undergo the natural process of cleansing and rebirth, but is instead full of the weariness of being effectually denied the benefit of a natural death. In this sense the experience of the questing company is here most reminiscent of Ulysses' confrontation with the restless stranded spirits of the dead in the Fifth Book of *The Odyssey*, for Mirkwood's trees seem similarly marooned in their inability to extricate themselves from the shadows of the past.

However, the secondary epic, Virgilian perspective on *katabasis* may be also found here if we consider *The Hobbit* not on its own, but in the context of the overall body of work making up Tolkien's vision for his secondary world.³⁰ In this perspective *katabasis* is a confrontation not as much with the timelessness of death as with the historical perspective on the events providing the immediate context for the

³⁰ Although *The Hobbit* found its way into the accumulated store of the mythology comprised in the *Legendarium* only in later perspective, the option to view it in this context is a valid critical approach if pursued sensitively and critical studies have adopted it occasionally.

quest. Although this dimension is less significant for *The Hobbit* than would be the case for *The Lord of the Rings*, the journey through the forest of Mirkwood is a confrontation with the past, inasmuch as the space of the forest preserves more of the burden of the past than the surrounding landscape. In the naturally seclusive, self-contained organism of the forest, the memory of the gradual rise of the powers of Sauron during the Second Age of Arda is retained and may be more directly felt.

In this way the passage through the forest offers the company the challenge of confronting the legacy of the past and of measuring themselves against the accumulated burden of the historical context of the quest, which is the essence of the use of the motif of *katabasis* in the Virgilian tradition. At the same time, the confrontation poses the danger of being submerged by the weight of the past and consequently being unable to continue the quest. The necessity of undergoing the katabatic experience stems here from the fact that being able to overcome the potentially destructive legacy of the past is an essential ingredient in the identity of an epic hero.

What matters more for the present argument is that we may see how the overall condition of Mirkwood results from the special nature of its ecosystem and how in its special spatial status and its ability to develop and preserve a special form of contact with the past the medieval notion of the marvellous is incorporated into its identity as an element of the imagery. It is consequently the marvellous layer of the forest's identity that becomes here the special target of the forces of evil, as it is through its corruption that further destruction of the fabric of natural life may be effected.

In the light of the above, we may now proceed to discuss those of the individual narrative motifs present in the account of the company's passage through Mirkwood which derive from the medieval literary heritage.

Indeed, the prolonged exposition to the marvellous has a profound impact on more than one of the members of the questing company – related to the idea of enchantment and *The Hobbit's* incarnation of the wood-elves. As the depiction of Tolkien's Elves has much more in common here with the medieval tradition than is the case in *The Lord of the Rings* and most of the *Legendarium*, the grandeur they generally

earn in Tolkien is here still relatively less important than the species' customary glamour. The elven glamour is what the medieval romance tradition bequeaths to its humbler descendants – the folk ballad and progressively later, the fairy tale. The subtlety of the narrative arrangement in *The Hobbit* is that the relatively low genre status of the “fairy enchantment” motifs makes them ideal for creating a clash of register, out of which the mock-heroic mode ultimately results.

Consequently, the narrative motifs which had originated in the context of the heroic tradition are here brought back into a narrative which is built upon the pattern of a heroic quest, and what is achieved in this way is both a comic effect on the level of the plot and a metatextual interplay with conventions.

Thus, although, on the strength of the *Legendarium* inferences, we identify “the king of the elves” as no other than King Thranduil, who would have been the resident in Mirkwood at this historical time, within the structure of the tale itself he is given no more historical identity or context than is bestowed upon “the king of fairies” in *Sir Orfeo*. This allows the idea of the wood-elves' magic to be brought closer to the medieval notions than is the case elsewhere in Tolkien, because it is here more the instrument of a self-protective, defensive character than an elevation of a spiritual power rooted ultimately in an extra-natural source, as we would classify the ‘white magic’ of Galadriel. Within the world of *The Hobbit* the magic of the Mirkwood offshoot of the Avari is not directly related to the universal ethical or spiritual dichotomy, but is to be overcome because it is an obstacle on a quest, it is not supposed to be defeated as much as passed through, or even, as the mock-heroic convention allows, bypassed on the way to the quester's goal.

Also the relationship between the wood-elves and the Mirkwood forest is more reciprocally symbiotic than the relationship of the Noldor with Lórien, because the Avari's detachment from the direct benefits of cultural and spiritual connection to Valinor makes their close bond with the natural world less a case of enlightened stewardship and more an instinctive drive based on the advantages of mutual protection. Hence the wood-elves seem to echo the wariness and even hostility against a penetration from the outside, which is a feature of their native habitat.

Therefore, if we choose to look at the nature of this symbiosis between the rational civilisation and the natural habitat within the context of *The Hobbit* only, we would find the encounter with King Thranduil's woodland kingdom to provide an opportune occasion for the test of resilience and sense of purpose which the katabatic experience invariably poses for the quester. If we were to look at it in the context of the whole design for the secondary world emerging from the accumulated body of texts where the philosophy behind it is enshrined, we might say that it would represent an example of imperfect symbiosis, whereby the failure of a culture to channel the spiritual influence upon its natural habitat makes the spiritually wounded ecosystem echo the culture's alienation from contact with potential sources of spiritual rejuvenation.

Although these two dimensions may be considered as unrelated from the textual point of view, one may see a glimpse of the idea of the lure of a spiritual surrender when, by the operation of the elven glamour, Bombur and then Bilbo himself succumb to a catatonic trance which renders them unresponsive:

There they sat for a long while and did not dare to make a move. Bombur slept on with a smile on his fat face, as if he no longer cared for all the troubles that vexed them.

....

He woke up suddenly and sat up scratching his head. He could not make out where he was at all, nor why he felt so hungry; for he had forgotten everything that had happened since they started their journey that May morning long ago. The last thing that he remembered was the party at the hobbits house, and they had great difficulty in making him believe their tale of all the many adventures they had had since.

When he heard that there was nothing to eat, he sat down and wept, for he felt very weak and wobbly in the legs. Why ever did I wake up! he cried. I was having such beautiful dreams. I dreamed I was walking in a forest rather like this one, only lit with torches on the trees and lamps swinging from the branches and fires burning on the ground; and there was a great feast going on, going on for ever. A woodland king was there with a crown of leaves, and there was a merry singing, and I could not count or describe the things there were to eat and drink.

The Hobbit, 137-140.

Although the motif of an enchanted sleep might have lost its more menacing undertones during its long residence in the generic realm of the fairy tale, behind its relatively benign surface lies the familiar threat of the loss of identity and dissipation of personality that makes it a close counterpart of the more sinister motif of madness experienced in the forest. Essentially, the motif is one emanation of the potential of the forest's environment to loosen one's grip on one's individual identity, which also makes it such an opportune place for the healing of post-traumatic stress and a rebuilding of one's personality after its integrity is compromised in the wake of a failure to honour a social obligation. In the context of *The Hobbit*, the challenge is primarily not to be distracted from the overall purpose of the quest, and in this episode it matches the katabatic experience of distraction and loss of the sense of time with a familiar motif, long preserved in the ballad/fairy tale of the danger of becoming stuck in the Fäerie after unwarily partaking of the food and drink offered there.

It seems that these events reflecting the negative side of the forest's capacity to transform one's identity are meant to be juxtaposed against their much more positive counterpart, which is Bilbo's acquisition of an recognisably heroic identity in the wake of killing the monstrous spider and saving the company of dwarves:

Somehow the killing of the giant spider, all alone by himself in the dark without the help of the wizard or the dwarves or of anyone else, made a great difference to Mr. Baggins. He felt a different person, and much fiercer and bolder in spite of an empty stomach, as he wiped his sword on the grass and put it back into its sheath. I will give you a name, he said to it, and I shall call you Sting.

The Hobbit, 146.

Here the textual mechanism by means of which the transformation of Bilbo is realised, elevating him from the typically mock-heroic register into the conventions of the heroic genres, makes full use of the idea of the forest as a place where the high concentration of the marvellous allows for more profound changes of identity to take place. On a different level we may see here an example of the protagonist answering to the challenge of the experience of *katabasis* by inflicting a lasting change on the place he visits during the experience,

as the slaughter of the spider renders the forest permanently more wholesome. This duly makes Bilbo's triumph especially valuable in the Christian context.

In general, whichever perspective we would chose to adopt here, Bilbo's heroic transformation in the forest of Mirkwood and his adoption of a new identity is one of the elements which elevates the whole narrative above the pastiche-like character which the use of the mere mock-heroic veil would set for the whole narrative. As Bilbo emerges from the forest vested in the new sense of importance, in possession of a regular epic weapon and clinging to a floating barrel, we may see how the ethical profundity of the Fairy Tale, as it has been defined in Tolkien's seminal essay, emerges to take control of the mock-heroic mode, just as any comic mode will recede before a moral dichotomy. The mock-heroic elements in the imagery of the narrative will ultimately serve here to underscore the Christian perspective on the classical notion of heroism, whereby the exertion of individual moral courage is the key determining circumstance, while the practical odds of an ethical confrontation are ultimately compensated by the involvement of the Providential factor. In this way Bilbo's triumph foreshadows Sam Gamgee's stabbing of Shelob with the very same sword.

Let us also consider another of the motifs relating to the forest which would take us this time beyond the boundaries of Mirkwood, and that is the motif of the *woodwasa*. We may see that the constituent elements of the motif of a confrontation with the Wildman of the forest are in fact present in two episodes: the meeting with Beorn and the affair with the trolls. Consequently, the motif is effectively split over two parts of the narrative in such a way that all the positive connotations of the character of the woodwose get attached to Beorn,³¹ while the potentially negative ones are bestowed upon the trolls. In the case of Beorn, his skin-changing abilities and consequent intimate contact and understanding of the animal ways and needs make him stand as a representative of the link between the various realms of Creation, the separation between which has been one of the most keenly felt effects of the success of the powers of evil. Now, Beorn's unquestioned moral sense coupled with animal-like stamina and an

³¹ As V. Flieger also notices, 2003: 99-100.

instinctive robustness makes him an effective helper in the quest and his martial prowess is likewise a significant asset in the final confrontation of the Battle of the Five Armies. Yet his intimacy with the animal world also sets him apart quite emphatically from the civilisation of many species and cultures which extends beyond the forests of Middle-earth, making the element of an eerie menace a vital part of his characterisation.

Thus it is perhaps not at all surprising that we find Beorn not living in the forest itself, but on its verge – as if representing the borderline between the natural world and the civilisations functioning outside it. This seems to be in accordance with Beorn’s essentially borderline identity, which makes him play the role of a transitional link between the two worlds. The reason why Beorn does not take residence in Mirkwood itself is evidently also because he preserves too much of the pristine, uncorrupted vigour of the natural world to have an interest in being subjected to the corrupting environment of the forest itself. Despite that, it is important that Beorn still chooses to reside as its effectual guardian.

Now, conversely, those elements of the identity of the woodwose that connote with brutish and mindlessness, and with the sheer threat of what is resident beyond the recognised norms of civilised behaviour, we shall find in the characters of the trolls, whom the company meets earlier on their way to Rivendell and who nearly succeed in terminating the mock-heroic quest in a suitably mock-heroic way. Arguably, being made of stone, trolls are not part of the natural environment in the same way in which the vegetative life forms evidently are, but the reason which they appear here in the capacity of the woodwose is twofold. First it is evident that Tolkien thought about trolls as possible substitutes for the classic woodwoses, or the kind of creatures which may be called upon to fulfil that kind of role because, in his translation of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, he uses “woodtrolls” for the word “wodewasan” in line 721.³² Consequently,

³² The use of “woodtrolls” is all the more significant inasmuch as Tolkien preserves for this line the same [w] alliterative cluster as the original and so clearly the modernised “woodwose” (which he otherwise uses for Túrin) would have been a plausible alternative for the translation.

in a direct nod to the medieval romance tradition, Bilbo and the dwarves are made, like Sir Gawain before them, to confront the woodwoses on their epic quest, only the motif gets split over two episodes in such a way that the trolls and Beorn share between them the traditional characteristics of the woodwose in such a way that whatever would have made the character of Beorn too unwholesome for his narrative role is bestowed upon the trolls. What is also important, the narrative incorporates the stock-character of the Wildman while avoiding the most gruesome elements in the typical representations of the woodwose, which might not sit agreeably beside with the fairy tale aesthetics of the narrative.

Taken on his own, the character of Beorn may also be seen as a figure who in his more complex identity outgrows the “woodwose” tradition he seems to have originated from, and in some way provides the half-way link between the Wildman of the Middle-English romance and the prelapsarian splendour of Tom Bombadil.

This brings us to considering the role of the forest in *The Lord of the Rings*. Here the first major encounter between the characters of the narrative and a forest ecosystem happens when the company of the hobbits enters the Old Forest on their way to meet Gandalf in Bree.³³ On first examination it may be seen that the episode is in many ways reminiscent of Bilbo and his company’s passage through Mirkwood. Again we have here a quest narrative where the questers’ destined path leads them through a forest, where the ancient grievance against the destructive encroachments of the outside civilisation has created an ecosystem closely bound together in an expression of intense hostility. Here again the enhanced responsiveness of the various organisms of the natural world to the phenomena related to the spiritual dimension has had the effect of actually increasing the trees’ enmity towards any manner of newcomers. This is especially menacing for a species like the hobbits, which may be used to living in a constant symbiosis with the natural world, but at the same time not naturally at home in the forest, as Merry’s comment illustrates well:

³³ About the role of the Old Forest see also Dickerson/Evans 2006: 137-141, and Campbell 2011: 264-269.

[...] the Forest is queer. Everything in it is very much more alive, more aware of what is going on, so to speak, than things are in the Shire. And the trees do not like strangers. They watch you. They are usually content merely to watch you, as long as daylight lasts, and don't do much. Occasionally the most unfriendly ones may drop a branch, or stick a root out, or grasp at you with a long trailer. But at night things can be most alarming, or so I am told. I have only once or twice been in here after dark, and then only near the hedge. I thought all the trees were whispering to each other, passing news and plots along in an unintelligible language; and the old forest branches swayed and groped without any wind. They do say the trees do actually move, and can surround strangers and hem them in.

The Fellowship of the Ring, 108.

The Old Forest is, in this sense, like Mirkwood – an expanse of potentially taxing territory, passage through which is in itself a test of the questers' stamina and courage. Unlike Mirkwood, which has at least remained an integral ecosystem through its history, Old Forest represents a mere relic of a much wider area of the southern part of the continent of Middle-earth in the Second and Third Age of Arda, which was known as Eriador. It may be for this reason that the level of hostility and malice with which it welcomes any new visitors is even greater than is the case with Mirkwood. It is also of a perceptibly different character, for whereas Mirkwood was an ecosystem which had lost the natural balance between various processes pertaining to the recreation of life, Old Forest is a living monument to death itself.

In Mirkwood, the overabundance of all forms of lichen and fungi is a testimony to an abnormal aging of the tree population because the symbiotic relation between the trees and their parasites, which is the basis of a forest ecosystem as such, has been shifted unduly in favour of one side. In Old Forest there are apparently no lichen or fungi at all – thus all symbiotic relations in the ecosystem have been terminated:

They picked a way among the trees, and their ponies plodded along, carefully avoiding the many writhing and interlacing roots. There was no undergrowth. The ground was rising steadily, and as they went forward it seemed that the trees became taller, darker, and thicker. There was no sound, except an occasional drip of moisture falling through the still leaves. For the moment there was no whispering or movement among the branches; but they

all got an uncomfortable feeling that they were being watched with disapproval, deepening to dislike and even enmity. The feeling steadily grew, until they found themselves looking up quickly, or glancing back over their shoulders, as if they expected a sudden blow. There was not as yet any sign of a path, and the trees seemed constantly to bar their way.

The Fellowship of the Ring, 109.

Another difference seems to be that Old Forest appears to possess not only no determined centre, but actually no definable depth, and this despite the fact that it is clearly demarcated from the neighbouring, cultivated space and that inside its darkness one immediately loses any sense of adherence to any objective space-coordinates. In consequence it tends to produce the claustrophobic effect of a suffocating closeness, despite the fact that, at the very same time, it evokes the sensation of being lost in an expanse of unending emptiness, and the eerie sounds accompanying Bilbo and the dwarves during their passage through Mirkwood are now superseded by the silence of a prolonged tension.

Old Forest is essentially another example of the capacity of the forest ecosystem to preserve time, to keep its intimate relation with the past intact through the longevity of its population and its privilege to protect itself through recourse to the marvellous. Yet with no new growth and no prospect of rejuvenation, the trees' prolonged existence becomes a tool of evil in a way which is somewhat parallel to what has happened to Gollum, as it becomes an example of a situation when life itself has been corrupted by the more than natural exposition to excessive suffering. In other words, the damage done to this particular ecosystem by the surrounding civilisations was to expose it to contact with spiritual evil, which usurped the natural longevity of the forest habitat to prolong death and decay.

Consequently, the forest's natural potential to preserve a relation with the past is, in the case of the Old Forest, twisted out of shape to yield an instrument of incessant torture by making the forest live in the constant consciousness of the ever-present inevitability of death. This has the effect of severing any link with or memory of the past, whereby memory finds solace in contemplating the lasting impact of a meaningful achievement.

Comparison to the corresponding motif of the river of forgetfulness is also telling: whereas in Mirkwood the trance-like state which the Enchanted River produces makes one experience visions of Elven glamour, in the case of Old Forest, the drowsing charms of Withiwindle serve to anaesthetise their victims for the voracity of Old Man Willow.

Now, the identity of Old Man Willow has already attracted much revealing scholarship.³⁴ If we were to add one more dimension to the enigma that this character represents, we might argue that Old Man Willow is essentially a product of the confrontation of the traditional natural world with the corruption that has infiltrated it through contact with the civilisations of the sapient species. He comes to life as an interpretation of evil conceived by the world of Nature on its own terms, as an answer to the evil brought to its doorstep by cultures that have grown out of the experience of a fallen spirituality. Thus, Old Man Willow is on this view a form of genetic experiment – a tree GMOed into a representation of fallen humanity, or the natural world’s interpretation of a fallen spiritual being, and in this sense it is a yet another example of a transformation of identity which happened at the verge of the forest where its fractured marvellous comes into contact with the world’s other habitats.

Consequently, the challenge it offers is one which may again be seen as fulfilling the role of *katabasis*, especially if one perceives it as having its counterpoint in the company’s dangerous confrontation in the Barrowdowns later on. Indeed the similarity of both is apparently a well-recognised phenomenon – as we are told that “the Barrow-downs had as sinister a reputation in hobbit-legend as the Forest itself” (*The Fellowship of the Ring*, 149), and the recollection of which returns to haunt the company even before its veracity is freshly proven true by the forthcoming events. As the pattern governing the use of epic conventions for the presentation of the quest is far more intricate in *The Lord of the Rings* than was the case in *The Hobbit*, the passage through Old Forest has here a markedly different narrative function than Bilbo’s journey through Mirkwood. The katabatic experience is not aligned here with any opportunity for an

³⁴ Compare Flieger 2017: 147-150, the polemic by Jeffers 2014: 30-31, as well as Dickerson/Evans 2006: 137-141.

elevation of the characters' statue by achieving heroic deeds. To the contrary, it marks a moment of the questing company's first exposure to the seriousness of death and the tangibility of evil. As the hobbits enter Old Forest, the narrative duly surrenders all manner of literary conventions which might be connected to the mock-heroic or the picaresque, and makes its first contact with the epic and myth.

In this sense Old Forest is thus meant to fulfil a different function in the narrative than was usually the case in the medieval tradition, for it represents primarily an expanse of territory to be covered during an early phase of the quest and this role is here even more emphatically dominant than was the case in *The Hobbit*. Old Forest is essentially an obstacle, the challenge is to pass it without being drawn any deeper inside it, it offers no potential for transformations of identity or displays of the marvellous. As we have seen, the worst ravage done to Old Forest is that it has been deprived of a centre and in consequence its internal space has been fractured and lost its concentric continuity, which mirrors the breakdown of symbiotic relations in its ecosystem. Thus Old Forest seems to possess no depth, no spatial interconnections and no innate mystery for the marvellous to feed upon.

The importance of this is that it seems that one of the chief functions Old Forest fulfils in the narrative is to stand for contrast with the forest of Lórien. Although after leaving Old Forest the members of the Fellowship pass through woods around Weathertop and also the woods surrounding Rivendell, it is the visit to Lórien that constitutes a second prolonged sojourn in a forest habitat during the quest. The Fellowship enters the hallowed forest of the Noldor and wood elves through the valley of the river of Nimrodel and subsequently follow the wider Silverlode. Through this journey the path of the Fellowship is said to lead "into the shadow of the deeper woods" (*The Fellowship of the Ring*, 444) and thus ever farther inside the forest and not through it. As the journey continues under the direction of the Elven sentries, the sensation of a penetration inward in space is doubled by the sensation of a penetration into the past:

As soon as he set foot upon the far bank of Silverlode a strange feeling had come upon him, and it deepened as he walked on into the Naith: it seemed to him that he had stepped over a bridge of time into a corner of the Elder

Days, and was now walking in a world that was no more. In Rivendell there was memory of ancient things; in Lórien the ancient things still lived on in the waking world. Evil had been seen and heard there, sorrow had been known; the Elves feared and distrusted the world outside: wolves were howling on the wood's borders: but on the land of Lórien no shadow lay.

The Fellowship of the Ring, 454.

It seemed to him that he had stepped through a high window that looked on a vanished world. A light was upon it for which his language had no name. All that he saw was shapely, but the shapes seemed at once clear cut, as if they had been first conceived and drawn at the uncovering of his eyes, and ancient as if they had endured for ever. He saw no colour but those he knew, gold and white and blue and green, but they were fresh and poignant, as if he had at that moment first perceived them and made for them names new and wonderful. In winter here no heart could mourn for summer or for spring. No blemish or sickness or deformity could be seen in anything that grew upon the earth. On the land of Lórien there was no stain.

The Fellowship of the Ring, 456.

We have already indicated that in Tolkien's secondary universe time, the forests routinely preserve a special relationship with time and that they tend to create spatial enclaves where a direct intimate link is developed with the legacy of the past. This sets the whole ecosystem apart from the outside space and is fundamental to the development of the layer of the marvellous, which is essentially a spiritual extension of its natural propensities. In this sense Lórien is no different from Old Forest or Mirkwood and what has just been said pertains equally to all of them. The reason why the forest of Lórien, despite being a natural habitat of the same kind, resembles the previous ones so little is to do wholly with the nature of the symbiotic relation of the natural ecosystem with the civilisation which has grown within its borders. The nature of the symbiotic relation has no direct parallel in the primary world, for no intelligent species enjoys there quite the same kind of genetically preordained interdependence with the natural habitat they occupy as do the Elves. In its healthy form, the symbiosis does not have the effect of compromising the Elves' relationship with the spiritual, nor does it interfere with their due place in the Providential design for intelligent life in

Eä. On the contrary, the effectiveness of the Elves' relation with the natural world, which on their side takes the form of a stewardship, is directly proportionate to their involvement with the spiritual, and their proper relationship with it. It is this circumstance that makes the most difference between Lórien and the wary reclusiveness of Mirkwood, where the Elven population has not been sufficiently exposed to the spiritual to avoid being swallowed into the instinctive ways of the natural world and, in consequence, the resulting symbiosis has grown too much into a relationship between equals, abandoning any chance of realising the immanent spiritual potential of such a relationship. The resultant difference between the two environments is thus visible to the naked eye, as Frodo takes a look at the distant forests of Mirkwood from atop Cerin Amroth:

Then he looked eastward and saw all the land of Lórien running down to the pale gleam of Anduin, the Great River. He lifted his eyes across the river and all the light went out, and he was back again in the world he knew. Beyond the river the land appeared flat and empty, formless and vague, until far away it rose again like a wall, dark and drear. The sun that lay on Lothlórien had no power to enlighten the shadow of that distant height. 'There lies the fastness of Southern Mirkwood,' said Haldir. 'It is clad in a forest of dark fir, where the trees strive one against another and their branches rot and wither'.

The Fellowship of the Ring, 458-459.

Conversely, in the case of Lórien, the intelligent civilisation is securely in charge of the ecosystem – here in a relationship with other forms of Creation which is definitely hierarchical without being oppressive, or one-sided. Indeed the strength of this forest ecosystem, as of any potential ecosystem on Arda, consists in a coexistence of culture and nature, but the symbiosis is not a partnership of equals. Rather, it is a mutually complementary arrangement whereby each side benefits from being a constituent element in an organism which is thus a more complete form of life and partakes more in the absolute form of life, as is present in Ilúvatar.

Thus we shall never meet in the whole of Arda an evil or corrupt civilisation which lives in a healthy natural habitat, and we shall never meet a natural habitat which remains healthy without

a healthy civilisation living in some sort of symbiosis with it. In this context part of the reason for the sorry state of Old Forest is that, in the absence of a sapient species to fulfil the role of enlightened guardians and protectors, the vegetative forms of life attempt to take upon themselves the duties of self-defence and, as this lies beyond their natural cognitive powers, they succeed in achieving merely a sanitary cordon of instinctual hostility. This is caused in no small part by the fact that the natural world is in itself incomplete without a symbiotic relationship with the societies of the sapient species, just like any sapient species cannot function properly without the protection of the Valar.

Importantly, the link of mutual dependence which is meant to exist in Tolkien's secondary world between the natural habitats and the cultures of the intelligent species, despite its formally hierarchical nature, has a humbling effect on the sapient cultures, as it stands as a palpable remainder of the inherent incompleteness of the individual forms of life. The imposition to care for the natural habitat, in turn, has the force of a divinely sanctioned prohibition, which failing to obey brings an automatic calamity upon the society.

Although the forest of Lórien offers what would arguably be the most positive example of a well-functioning natural symbiosis between the various levels of Creation, the intense sense of longing and nostalgia which perceptibly permeates the otherwise serene environment of the Elven forests is still a potent remainder of the fact that, for all its glories, the aura of doomed finality which extends over Lórien is an echo of the Nodor's severed connection with the guardian spirits of Valinor. Indeed it may be the forest's natural longevity that makes the echo of the Curse of Mandos reverberate here with more strength than it might have done anywhere else.

It is because its special relationship with time and its organic link with the ancient history of Arda that Lórien stands thus as an environment set apart from the outside world, an environment whose hallowed aura makes its marvellous layer become a channel for the hierophantic experience of intimate contact with the spiritual to be unveiled before the questing Fellowship. If we consider the internal structure of this forest environment and its spatial relation to and function in the space of the quest, we shall notice that Lórien

in no way resembles the fractured emptiness of Old Forest, or the oppressive, meandering space of Mirkwood. The most fundamental feature of Lórien is its concentric layout. The outer stretches of the surrounding forest are all related in their spatial coordinate reference by the centrally positioned wooded lowlands of Egladil. Centrally positioned here is the capital city of Caras Galadon, built upon the plan of a perfect circle with the surrounding stone road and a fosse and the royal quarters towering in its midst upon the hill. Equally important is the fact that the Fellowship never crosses Lórien – rather, it suspends the journey to gradually penetrate ever deeper into its space as it unveils before them. After visiting Celeborn and Galadriel in Caras Galadon, the Fellowship are led back from the centre of the forest to the banks of Silverlode and subsequently follow it downstream to the “Great River” of Aduin, thereby leaving the land on their course south west.

In consequence, Lórien remains a circular space of gradually increasing concentration of the marvellous and therefore, of all of Tolkien’s forests, it most resembles the medieval spatial template. Instead of being an expanse of space to be conquered in the course of the quest, Lórien never loses its special status of being set apart from the surrounding space coordinates, its depth cannot be penetrated through – the farthest one may get to is the centre. Here the physical, spatial layout of the Elven forest habitat has the function of elevating it beyond the mere conceptual confines of a limited expanse of space which is defined by geographical relations with other similar spatial constructs to be found on a two-dimensional map. Instead Lórien seems to exist in four dimensions and it is therefore never fully adjacent to the outside space, and this tendency increases daily as Middle-earth comes ever more under the shadow of evil in the closing years of the Third Age – hence Haldir compares the position of Lórien to “an island” (*The Fellowship of the Ring*, 453). It is this extension of its space into the dimension of time and into the accumulated grandeur of history that makes the sense of the Providential design virtually one of the spatial coordinates.

It is this feature of the Lórien ecosystem that determines the nature of the forest’s marvellous dimension. The sense of entering the space of a living organism which operates in more than the usual

dimensions is alone enough to evoke a sense of awe from any traveller, but the underlying unity of all elements of Creation also offers an insight into the past, the future and one's self which extends beyond what may be achieved elsewhere, where the individual perception is compromised by the constant white noise of evil. Thus what stands behind the marvellous quality of the forest of Lórien is the hierophantic closeness to the spiritual and the communal consciousness of its relevance, which the civilisation resident there has managed to preserve. In this sense, Lórien may be seen as Tolkien's literary incarnation of the prelapsarian Garden of Eden.

This is why the marvellous allows here for the operation of magic in the Mirror of Galadriel, which enables one, just like the magic mirror Princess Canace receives as gift from the King of Arabia in *The Squire's Tale*, to "openly" see through deceit and deception and discern any sign of threat. Even more importantly, it allows one to reach the kind of insight into one's own motives and desires as Galadriel demonstrated when she rejects the offer of the Ring. In this sense there is probably no better place than Lórien to truly appreciate why this form of making use of the extra-sensual layer of the world of elements came to be called "natural magic".

Following the trail of the Fellowship quest we will finally find ourselves in what has always been the most famous of Tolkien's many forest ecosystems – Fangorn Forest. Located at the south-western tip of the long range of the Misty Mountains, Fangorn is, like Old Forest, a remnant of a much wider expanse of forest which had covered a considerable part of Eriador during the Second Age. Similarly to the other forests growing in Tolkien's secondary world, it is the impression of longevity that becomes the defining characteristic of Fangorn, and it is not surprising that it is the sense of entering an environment defined by a different relation to time that first strikes Merry, who is the focaliser of the narrative at the moment when the two hobbits desperately seek refuge from the ferocious battle between the Rohirrim and the Orcs:

He led the way in under the huge branches of the trees. Old beyond guessing, they seemed. Great trailing beards of lichen hung from them, blowing and swaying in the breeze.

The Two Towers, 598.

At first blush we might assume that the two most prominent characteristics which determine the relation between the forest environment and the characters – the lack of light and the sense of an oppressive, stifling closeness – would allow us to classify Fangorn as no different than Old Forest or Mirkwood have been before. Yet it is telling that these potentially similar sensations conjure up in Pippin connotations and memories which are actually positive:

Yes, it is all very dim, and stuffy, in here,’ said Pippin. ‘It reminds me, somehow, of the old room in the Great Place of the Tooks away back in the Smials at Tuckborough: a huge place, where the furniture has never been moved or changed for generations. They say the Old Took lived in it year after year, while he and the room got older and shabbier together – and it has never been changed since he died, a century ago. And Old Gerontius was my great-great-grandfather: that puts it back a bit. But that is nothing to the old feeling of this wood. Look at all those weeping, trailing, beards and whiskers of lichen! And most of the trees seem to be half covered with ragged dry leaves that have never fallen. Untidy. I can’t imagine what spring would look like here, if it ever comes; still less a spring-cleaning.’

The Two Towers, 600-601.

Thus, Fangorn seems to impact upon the hobbits in different way than Old Forest, for the sense of extreme longevity evokes, for Pippin, images which reflect the young person’s feeling of being naturally excluded from the people and environments whose impossibly quaint ways will inevitably set them apart from the impatient attitudes of youth, as the barrier between the young and the old is the result of their formative experiences being related to the times one could naturally have no access to. Yet the sheer intimacy of these childhood images connected with the closest of relatives is a testimony to a very different aura which the forest exudes. Furthermore, although from the imagery point of view, Fangorn, with its dense mesh of entangled branches and overabundance of lichen, looks most like Mirkwood, it becomes clear that there is still a considerable difference in terms of the places’ overall spirit, as Merry’s comment seems to suggest:

‘It does not look or feel at all like Bilbo’s description of Mirkwood. That was all dark and black, and the home of dark black things. This is just dim, and frightfully tree-ish. You can’t imagine *animals* living here at all, or staying for long.’

The Two Towers, 601.

This observation essentially classifies Fangorn Forest as an ecosystem which preserved its original native goodness, and manages not to descend into the state of wounded lifelessness which would make it prey to all forms of evil, but it still functions in a sort of lopsided way with its natural balance being somehow compromised. This may be perhaps explained in its historical perspective as Fangorn both benefits from Yavanna’s appointed shepherd guardians of the vegetative world and yet stands abandoned and excluded from the destined symbiosis between a natural ecosystem and a rational civilisation which preserved a healthy relation with the spiritual. It is visible here that the need for the natural environment to be protected by a sapient species will not be bypassed or rendered less pressing by the presence of the Ents, as the Ents were meant as a defensive force guarding the forests³⁵ against excessive territorial encroachments by the outside civilisations, which might be the outcome of the process of natural expansion of other forms of life. Moreover, the Ents depended on contact with the one specific rational species – the Elves – for their very existence.

Consequently the Ents were not expected to be able to single-handedly deal the destructive influence of spiritual evil because in their “genetic” makeup and predispositions they were still part of the natural world, and thus a world not destined to take an independent, offensive stance in the spiritual conflicts of the material world, but to rather make the rational culture living in the material world complete. This organic dependence of the living forms of the natural world upon their rational partners is fully recognised by Treebeard:

³⁵ Compare Flieger 2017: 150-151, Dickerson/Evans 2006: 119-129; 250-252.

‘Some of my kin look just like trees now, and need something great to rouse them; and they speak only in whispers. But some of my trees are limb-lithe, and many can talk to me. Elves began it, of course, waking trees up and teaching them to speak and learning their tree-talk. They always wished to talk to everything, the old Elves did. But then the Great Darkness came, and they passed away over the Sea, or fled into far valleys, and hid themselves, and made songs about days that would never come again.

The Two Towers, 610,

For Ents are more like Elves: less interested in themselves than Men are, and better at getting inside other things. And yet again Ents are more like Men, more changeable than Elves are, and quicker at taking the colour of the outside, you might say. Or better than both: for they are steadier and keep their minds on things longer.

The Two Towers, 610.

The unique insight of Treebeard into the respective species is in fact priceless inasmuch as we are offered a glimpse of the precise nature of the symbiosis between the Elven culture and the natural ecosystem which they inhabit. It becomes evident that the natural “communal” longevity of the forest ecosystem creates a special relation to the passage of time in the space it occupies. It is this special aura that carries here the legacy of the medieval concept of the marvellous for it allows the sensory renewal to happen which the necessary prerequisite state for the experiences of transformations of identity to take place.

Now this becomes a natural environment for a rational civilisation, like the Elves, whose more direct contact with the spiritual makes them developed a specially profound sense of the pattern behind the passage of time, i.e. an insight into the Providential dimension of history, and it is on this that the sense of identity of the rational culture is based. In consequence, as the Elven civilisation parasites upon the natural qualities of their forest habitat, so the forest ecosystem benefits from a more intimate contact with the spiritual, which such a civilisation in a healthy form should automatically bring into the bargain. Within this design no form of life is self-sufficient and their mutual dependence constitutes a preordained imperative for all kinds of existence.

Now as we see here, the deeper connection to the providential dimension of history does in itself come natural to the living forms of the natural world and, for this reason, the heavy sense of nostalgia which has marked the Elven civilisation in Middle-earth in its twilight during the closing years of the Third Age becomes a perceptible burden to the forest ecosystem, as we have seen in the case of the Lórien forest. In a similar fashion the endemic corruptibility and unsteady character of the civilisations of Men becomes a particularly hard challenge to the ecosystem of the Old Forest:

[...] There are still some very black patches.'

'Like the Old Forest away to the north, do you mean?' asked Merry.

'Aye, aye, something like, but much worse. I do not doubt there is some shadow of the Great Darkness lying there still away north; and bad memories are handed down.

The Two Towers, 609-610.

This is because the naturally vegetative environment of the forest is predestined to focus on adaptability and continued vitality in the timeless circles of rebirth rather than entangled in the patterns of the past. Consequently Treebeard's own sense of nostalgia is not for a historical time, but for a condition of being which is most concomitant with experiencing the fullness of life:

Time was when I could walk and sing all day and hear no more than the echo of my own voice in the hollow hills. The woods were like the woods of Lothlórien, only thicker, stronger, younger.

The Two Towers, 609-610.

Although all the various elements of Creation were destined for a life in an organic symbiosis and mutual cooperation, the nature of each is nevertheless profoundly different because each one is to make a unique contribution towards the full variety of life in the created universe. In prosperous times, the inherent insufficiency is a stimulus for developing mutual dependence and fostering humility. In times of conflict, the differing concerns of each of the various species and cultures will make them drift ever further away from each other. This is what Treebeard effectively means when he says:

I do not like worrying about the future. I am not altogether on anybody's *side*, because nobody is altogether on my *side*, if you understand me: nobody cares for the woods as I care for them, not even Elves nowadays.

The Two Towers, 615.

Thus, although the natural world might not have been the central target of either the Doom of the Noldor or the malice of Morgoth, the effects of both have resulted in its being estranged from the other sections of Creation meant to provide the enlightened stewardship necessary for it to enjoy the fullness of its being. Arguably for the Elves and men of Middle-earth, being entangled in the meanders of history and worrying about the shape of the future is a legitimate concern and challenge resulting from their present predicament; it also constitutes a way to defend the natural world for the various forms of corruption brought about by the ascent of evil. Yet it also condemns all the individual elements of Creation to a self-absorbed form of life which compromises their duty to contribute to Creation as a whole. It is this process that becomes one of the most important effects of evil within Creation in Tolkien's secondary world. In this sense the natural world must be included in the incisive observation which the members of Fellowship hear in Lórien:

'Indeed in nothing is the power of the Dark Lord more clearly shown than in the estrangement that divides all those who still oppose him'.

The Two Towers, 453.

In this sense the protection which the Ents have extended over Fangorn Forest has been only a partial success, although it has fulfilled all its set aims. Thus, as the continued excessive deforestation, coupled with the ravages of the successive wars, resulted in making the spiritually awakened trees descend into a regressive state of vegetative apathy or else succumb to a spiritual corruption, the insufficiency of the Ent's guardianship is made manifest:

Some of us are still true Ents, and lively enough in our fashion, but many are growing sleepy, going tree-ish, as you might say. Most of the trees are just trees, of course; but many are half awake. Some are quite wide awake, and a few are, well, ah, well getting *Entish*. That is going on all the time.

‘When that happens to a tree, you find that some have *bad* hearts. Nothing to do with their wood: I do not mean that.’

The Two Towers, 609-610.

In this context it becomes important that it takes the stimulus and intervention from beyond the world of Nature, brought about by the heroic intrusion of Merry and Pippin, that has the effect of propelling the forest of Fangorn into a direct intervention against Saruman. The unprecedented involvement of the natural world in a conflict which is ultimately spiritual, inasmuch as it has been caused by the corrupt nature of a fallen Maia, is significant in this context for two reasons. First it is a testimony to the unprecedented intensity of the struggle which has at this point engulfed Middle-earth. Secondly, it paradoxically reinforces the notion of the organic completeness of Creation in Tolkien’s secondary world and the reciprocal nature of the relation between all its levels. Fangorn’s overthrowing of Saruman may be directly caused by the destruction of the natural world by the wizard’s newly founded regime, but these actions are, in their turn, a direct result of Saruman’s abandonment of ethical and spiritual principles in a bid for power. As the wizard’s slide into evil takes him to the extremity of cruelty and despotism, the violent defensive reaction of the natural world is nothing other than the activation of a mechanism instilled into Creation for this very purpose. It becomes apparent here that the nominally dominant position of the civilisation of the sapient species in their relations with the natural habitat may exist only as long as the civilisation does not abandon the principles of reason and, in direct consequence, the right ethical stance. Conversely, ill treatment of the natural world is in itself a testimony to the spiritual corruption of the particular civilisation. In other words, losing control of the world of Nature is the inevitable consequence of a civilisation sliding into tyranny, and a violent reaction of the elements of the natural world is a preinstalled brake mechanism aimed at the activation of a natural process which will result in the reinstatement of the balance between the individual sections of Creation. This philosophy will take us beyond the intertextual link of the motif with *Macbeth*, right to the medieval ideas concerning the immanent order of Nature and the mechanism by means of which

political tyranny brings upon itself automatic destruction – which may be found, for instance, in St. Thomas Aquinas' *De Regno*. The way in which this heritage is transformed in Tolkien's secondary world has to do with the more reciprocal and less hierarchical nature of the relations between Nature and the sapient cultures as well as the degree to which the natural world directly partakes of the ethical consciousness, which in the primary world is more exclusively the domain of the rational creatures. In this context it becomes significant that the reaction of Fangorn's natural population against the outrage of Saruman's rule comes only after the matter is deliberated upon in council and subsequently put forward for a joint decision. The significance of the Entmoot in this context is that it constitutes an example of the exercise of free will and as such it involves the Ents and, with them, the whole of the forest in a dalliance with the intellectual consideration of ethical matters. This, in turn, has the effect of involving creatures who nominally perceive themselves as related rather with the natural world more immediately in the norms and habits of the rational forms of Creation. Thus, although it might arguably be said that the Entmoot serves only to establish whether the mandatory conditions for the intervention have in fact occurred, still the process has the effect of highlighting the continuous nature of the relations between the various parts of Creation in Tolkien's secondary world.

Thus, the Ents represent the furthest extent that the natural world may, on its own, reach out into the strange domain of the rational creatures whose freedom of moral choice is the main battleground in the spiritual struggle that defines the fortunes of all of Creation. Standing at the crossroads between the various levels of material beings the Ents merge in their constitution an instinctual sympathy for the way in which the natural world partakes of the reality of Eä with the conscious exercise of stewardship over Nature which has otherwise been the exclusive privilege and duty of the rational species. Their evident role is to stress the inherent continuity, interdependence and harmony of Creation which in itself has been its natural defensive mechanism guarding it against the intrusions of evil.

It is precisely at this moment in our discussion that we need to take a look south east from Fangorn Forest, across the plains of

Rohan to the smaller ecosystem of Druadan Forest, located in the land of Anorien alongside the mountain ridge of Ered Nimrais, guarding the westward passage to Minas Tirith. There, for the second time in Tolkien's fiction, we shall hear the term "woodwose" being bestowed upon a character³⁶ as Éomer explains to Merry the identity of the bizarre newcomers who have arrived to offer their allegiance to the King of the Rohirrim :

You hear the Woses, the Wild Men of the Woods: thus they talk together from afar. They still haunt Druadan Forest, it is said. Remnants of an older time they be, living few and secretly, wild and wary as the beasts. They go not to war with Gondor or the Mark; but now they are troubled by the darkness and the coming of the orcs: they fear lest the Dark Years be returning, as seems likely enough.

The Return of the King, 1087.

Previously, we were able to trace certain characteristics of various key figures of Tolkien's entangled narratives back to the medieval stock character of the woodwose, whereby the medieval tradition was used as a starting point for an imaginative extension which in final outcome produced the more refined personalities of Beorn or Tom Bombadil. Now we are faced with a direct borrowing of the medieval personage, which in the overt characterisation and concept does not go beyond a straightforward pastiche. This helps create a metatextual mechanism which anchors the Wildmen to the senses of the distant and finite past which corresponds to their role in the narrative. Indeed the function of the Wildmen of Druadan is quite emphatically connected with bringing in the perspective of ancient history. It is important that Merry, who is the internal focaliser here, is made to get the first glimpse of the Woses after he is first acquainted with the mysterious carved statues of the Púkel-men on his way from Edoras to Dunharrow. The echo of that memory nearly superimposes itself on his subsequent perception of the Wildmen and through that impression the aura of deep antiquity of the race is channelled down to the reader:

³⁶ See also the brief discussion in Flieger (2003: 100).

There sat Théoden and Éomer, and before them on the ground sat a strange squat shape of a man, gnarled as an old stone, and the hairs of his scanty beard straggled on his lumpy chin like dry moss. He was short-legged and fat-armed, thick and stumpy, and clad only with grass about his waist. Merry felt that he had seen him before somewhere, and suddenly he remembered the Púkel-men of Dunharrow. Here was one of those old images brought to life, or maybe a creature descended in true line through endless years from the models used by the forgotten craftsmen long ago.

The Return of the King, 1088.

Being instrumental in speeding up the passage of the Rohirrim troops through the mountain passes west of Minas Tirith, the Woses play a crucial role in facilitating the lifting of the siege of Gondor and consequently earn for themselves surprisingly substantial credit in the Wars of the Ring. Moreover, the Wildmen seem also to perform a crucial function in the structure of the narrative, for their effective role is to stand in for the completeness of Creation as a direct counterpart of the Ents. As the Ents stand as the further extension of the natural world into the nominally higher rational forms of existence, so the Wildmen of Druadan appear to reach out as far into the natural world as any sapient natural will allow. Measuring up the Ents in longevity and persistent, stubborn clinging to their original identity and function, the Woses allow the continuity of Creation to effectively be its defining function in the same degree as its hierarchical arrangement.

As the ancient tribe's customary lack of concern in the conflicts of the other rational species is cast aside in the face of the unprecedented urgency and menace of the war with Sauron, the theme of general awakening of all levels of Creation, and subsequent rectification of reciprocal relations and tightening of mutual bonds severed by the protracted clandestine influence of evil, is in this way significantly reinforced as the contribution which the Ents and the Wildmen collectively make to the war effort goes way beyond a mere symbolic gesture.

Yet one may still distinguish between the Ents' enlightened sense of duty, which is a vestige of their contact with the civilisation of the Elves, and the Wildmen's limited mental scope, centred on concerns directly related to self-preservation. This seems to be a consequence

of the fact that, for all the inherent harmony of Creation, it still makes a difference which direction one follows on the vertical scale of Nature – the Wildmen are weighted down by their intimate contact with the natural habitat (in which they seem to resemble the woodland elves of Mirkwood), while the Ents are drawn up by their emulation of the Elven “shepherding” spirit of providing care for the natural habitat instead of being engulfed and reduced in the constant symbiosis. Tolkien’s Woses are therefore not the belligerent, unpredictable creatures of the romance tradition, but neither are they ever positioned in any relation to the marvellous layer of any natural ecosystem. Another circumstance which seems significant is a certain symbolic dimension in Middle-earth’s geography, which we may notice if we consider how the most traditional of the existing human civilisations in Middle-earth, i.e. that of the Rohirrim, is bound on either side by the two complimentary species, standing at the threshold of the world of Nature and the world of the Spirit.

Given all this it appears to be no coincidence that, even as the Entmoot is taking place in the depths of the forest of Fangorn, we may witness a striking example of the reincarnation of the already familiar motif a marvellous transformation of identity taking place at the verge of the forest:

[...] There he stood, grown suddenly tall, towering above them. His hood and his grey rags were flung away. His white garments shone. He lifted up his staff, and Gimli’s axe leaped from his grasp and fell ringing on the ground. The sword of Aragorn, stiff in his motionless hand, blazed with a sudden fire. Legolas gave a great shout and shot an arrow high into the air: it vanished in a flash of flame. ‘Mithrandir!’ he cried. ‘Mithrandir!’

...

They all gazed at him. His hair was white as snow in the sunshine; and gleaming white was his robe; the eyes under his deep brows were bright, piercing as the rays of the sun; power was in his hand. Between wonder, joy, and fear they stood and found no words to say.

The Two Towers, 644.

The significance of the fact that the manifestation of Gandalf’s new identity takes place at the verge of the forest of Fangorn goes well beyond being a mere reiteration of the medieval romance tradition

or an exercise in metatextual interplay. Gandalf's resurrection in a newly enhanced spiritual identity seems to mirror the forest's new awakened consciousness and highlight the dramatic necessities of the upcoming climax of the war with Sauron. Moreover, the use of the motif brings us into contact again with the hierophanic character of the forest as a spatial construct. Fangorn is, similarly to Lórien, never penetrated or traversed by any of the characters. In textual terms, Gandalf's emergence from its unfathomable depths into the outside world to unveil his new identity before his old friends has the effect of reinstating the idea of the forest's marvellous dimension in its role as the threshold of the miraculous. In this sense the border between the forest and the surrounding outside world is the meeting point of the material and the spiritual and consequently Gandalf's epiphany made against the impenetrable recesses of Fangorn not only brings the spiritual into contact with the ordinary space, but also in some way rejuvenates and ennobles the forest itself by refreshing its hierophanic potential.

This element seems to be especially telling if we see it in the context of the entire quest in *The Lord of the Rings*. In this context Gandalf's transformation, coming in the wake of his heroic fulfilment of social obligation, corresponds to the awakening of the natural world which play a significant part in the ultimate success of the quest, while it also anchors this natural rebirth in the new spiritual intensity brought into Creation to answer the overwhelming threat of evil.

As we have been able to see, what makes Tolkien's dialogue with the medieval literary and cultural legacy in relation to the concept and role of the forest particularly interesting is that the symbolic connotation of the idea of the forest as well as its social context is here intertwined with the cognitive norms of space perception and aesthetic habits. Hence the interplay of motif and references plays out in Tolkien on two distinct layers. What this entails is that we arrive at a narrative model whereby a new value is bestowed upon a traditional motif whenever it appears in the context of modern cognitive norms and modern literary conventions. Thus the degree to which various elements of the imagery partake of the medieval legacy is in itself a meaningful circumstance in determining their perspective character. In other words, the degree to which a given forest incorporates

the medieval heritage varies within each narrative and the contrast between the various kinds of forest which we thereby arrive at serves to present the different forms according to which the natural world functions and relates to other elements of the secondary world. Consequently, the appropriation of the medieval motifs serves in Tolkien to expand the dimensions of the narrative beyond the confines of the formal realist aesthetics, creating a sense of the marvellous by making the metatextual context provide additional depth for the experience both of the characters and of the narrative's audience.

III. The Forest in the Work of George R. R. Martin

If we now raise our eyes from the map of Middle-earth to look at the forests of the Known World, which constitutes the setting for George R. R. Martin's intricately woven saga, we shall first notice that, if we were to measure the relative area occupied by forests in percentage terms, the proportion would be smaller than in Tolkien's secondary world. Although Martin's interlaced narrative effectively takes the reader across a wider expanse of fictional space than Tolkien's complete oeuvre ever does, it must be first noticed that, of the two great continents dominating the landscape of Martin's secondary world, none of the characters interact with a forest ecosystem when they are in Essos, apart from the newly-wed Daenerys briskly passing through the forest of Quohor on her way to the Dorthraki central settlement of Vaes Dothrak.

Of the forests once that once covered a significant portion of the continent of Westeros, we learn that they were for the most part destroyed by the first wave of human settlement which spread across most of the continent, which happened around 10,000 years before the moment when the reader is introduced into the unveiling intrigues of *A Game of Thrones*. Of the remaining forest areas the biggest is the Haunted Forest, spreading to the North beyond the protective border of the Wall. Within the Seven Kingdoms the most sizeable and significant forests ecosystems are those of the King's Wood, located south of the capital city of King's Landing, the Wolfswood, surrounding the ancient seat of House Stark at Winterfell, and

the sparse woodland covering some parts of the Riverlands and the Vale of Arryn.

Yet it is the forests' relationship with the human civilisation of Westeros that makes them play such a significant and unique role in Martin's narrative. Once we burrow more deeply in the legends of the heroic past and ancient history which form the mythical layer of Martin's subcreated universe, we shall find that the relationship between human civilisation and the world of Nature derives from a different conceptual and philosophical framework than that which forms Tolkien's idea for the created universe of *Ēa*. Here the natural world and human civilisation are not bound together in an eschatological frame projecting a divinely sanctioned *logos* into a mutually correlated system of interwoven dependencies. In fact, the world of Nature constitutes here the most immediately present layer of the inimical universe, instilled with full potency for inflicting all manner of physical harm on the human characters and creating an aura more reminiscent of the fatalistic existential determinism, whereby the legacy of Shakespearean tragedy is reinforced by the modern existentialist philosophical tradition. In Martin's universe the errant fortunes of history do not constitute a re-enactment of a divinely sanctioned scheme unveiled first on the mythical plain of reality and are not traceable to any objective spiritual context. Similarly none of the many religions which contribute to the variety of cultures and philosophical spectrum of Martin's secondary world is vindicated in a way which would provide a Providential framework of reference which would spiritually validate the historical perspective and provide an underlying context for the relations between different elements of the subcreated world. In fact, as religion and the supernatural are here closely bound with the local geographical dimension and the spatial perspective, no sense of an objective spiritual framework is ever generated. Thus, although Nature is permeated here with a supernatural aura which extends beyond the material, it is not made part of any one synchronous organism of Creation, but rather generates its own spiritual extension which embodies the identity of the natural ecosystem.

Consequently we learn in the course of Martin's narrative that neither the influence of the gods brought to Westeros in the wake of the Andal migration, nor the potent power of the Red God whose

worship originated in Essos, extends into the forests beyond the Wall, while the religion of the Drowned God of the Ironmen loses its vitality when deprived of the immediate context of the maritime habitat. It indeed seems that, as often as not, the various human cultures are placed at the receiving end of the spiritual symbiosis, for their religiosity becomes effectively shaped by the nature of their habitat and consequently the idea of human stewardship of Nature does not appear to have any validity in Martin's secondary world. This makes the forests of Westeros more autonomous, independent habitats of an impenetrable and unfathomable character, whereby the medieval tradition connecting the forest with the idea of the marvellous is frequently expressed with reference to the concept of the outside. Consequently, the relationship between the forests and human civilisation is more determined by binary patterns which do not derive from any hierarchical concepts of interdependence, as was the case in Tolkien.

Thus, for instance, one vital aspect which reflects the philosophy behind the nature and character of the forests in *A Song of Ice and Fire* is the question of their native population, i.e. the way in which George R. R. Martin chose to appropriate the medieval model of the characters of the elves. As we have already mentioned, this model is significantly altered in Tolkien's fiction, where the elves are transformed into a respectable civilisation and become incorporated into the Providential scheme of Creation. In the case of Martin's secondary world, we move both closer to and further from the medieval roots of the concept of the elves, for we have here two individual species – the Children of the Forest and the Others – who both evidently and directly derive from the medieval tradition of the elves. Within this scheme the negative connotations or aspects of the medieval elf: the sense of the menace of the unknown, the sheer barbarism and cruelty as well as the attitude of high-minded egotism and contempt for the human world is channelled into the characters of the Others, while the gentler strains of the elvish glamour, as well the idea of a more organic, symbiotic relationship with the world of Nature, have been bestowed, together with some elements of the later concept of the “noble savage”, upon the Children of the Forest.

This kind of framework results not only in highlighting the different forms of relations of the human civilisation and the world

of Nature, but also has the effect of stressing the wideness of the gap between the two, which in itself is the outcome of the fact that Nature and civilisation constitute here two layers uneasily superimposed upon each other by an evolutionary process of transformation based upon no divinely sanctioned scheme.

Let us thus commence our discussion of the nature and function of the forest in Martin's subcreated reality at the very opening of the narrative. In the Prologue to *A Game of Thrones*, we follow the account of an expedition squad of the Night's Watch venturing into the Haunted Forest beyond the Wall, focalised on a young recruit called Will. The way he comes to experience the unique character of the ecosystem around him may not initially differ from the aura of sullen menace which confronted characters seeking passage through Mirkwood or Old Forest in Tolkien:

A cold wind was blowing out of the north, and it made the trees rustle like living things. All day, Will had felt as though something were watching him, something cold and implacable that loved him not.

A Game of Thrones, 10.

Yet when the patrol is attacked and his fellow watchmen killed in a confrontation with the Others, we witness something with no parallel in Tolkien's fiction, namely we observe an intelligent species which seems to make the most of a natural symbiotic integration with their native forest habitat and whose actions and attitudes would be classified as evil from the human perspective. Yet, from the perspective of the forest, they may be seen as an incarnation of the instinctive urge for self-preservation and protection of the natural habitat. While in their bond with the forest habitat and cold-blooded cruelty towards the humans the Others merely reiterate the medieval conceptual template of the elves, it seems that the level of their identification with the ecosystem of the forest is even greater than would be found in this model:

The woods gave answer: the rustle of leaves, the icy rush of the stream, a distant hoot of a snow owl.

The Others made no sound.

A Game of Thrones, 10.

All this indicates straight away that the inherent philosophy and conception of the forest as an individual ecosystem is markedly different between Tolkien and Martin. As we have been able to see, in the world of Arda no evil sapient species attempts to establish its habitat in a forest. In fact, none of the various kinds of the Tolkienian Elves ever descend into a comparable condition of unpremeditated hostility and instinctual aggression. If we further assume that the species which would be most comparable to the Others in their general attitude towards other species are the Orcs, it will be very crucial to observe that the Orcs never attempt to take residence in any forest and are merely able to destroy it utterly, they never transform its nature into one based on active, aggressive evil. Thus although, in Tolkien, forests may be broken and remade into a ghastly image of brooding malice, they never become the natural habitat of an intelligent and malignant species. In *A Song of Ice and Fire*, where no notion of an underlying unity of Creation is ever introduced, the hostility of a forest ecosystem is not a sign of its descent from a natural state of benign coexistence with other sections of Creation, but represent its natural condition resulting from an instinctual drive for self-preservation. Consequently, whatever in this ecosystem extends beyond the natural, and thus technically enters the category of the marvellous, does not comply with the human moral norms or any overriding spiritual framework.

As we enter Martin's narrative against the context of this dramatic prelude, we are made witness to two related events of which both take place at the verge of the forest. First, Lord Eddard Stark, the head of the ancient baronial house and royal Warden of the North, executes the unfortunate watchman whose traumatised conduct following the experience of the Others' vindictive glamour causes him to be taken for a deserter and sentenced to death. Then, on the company's way back, Lord Stark's children are inexplicably made to find a litter of direwolves left in a desperate condition beside their dead mother.

It seems that the juxtaposition is not coincidental here. It appears to, first, reflect the inherent binarity in the relations between the forest and the human world and, secondly, it reintroduces the familiar motif of the manifestation of the marvellous at the edge of the forest in a novel configuration. The uncanny appearance of the direwolf

cubs, which becomes in its due course a stimulus for the awakening of skin-changing abilities in the boisterous Stark offspring, is an instance of the forest's marvellous reality penetrating into the human world in a way which is so assertive and forceful that, instead of being a manifestation, it may be termed an invasion. Although the power behind it appears to be more benign than whatever stands behind the cold malice of the Others, its ultimate significance and import is never decisively demonstrated in the course of the narrative as we have it. It thus remains an intrusion of an alien realm of reality drawing the human characters inside itself and establishing a connection which reaches across the gap yawning between the natural and the human world.

Against this the pathetic aura surrounding Lord Eddard's exercise of judicial powers has the effect of belittling the human side of the binary opposition. The sense of a wilful imposition of mental limitation upon the relations of the human civilisation with the reality extending beyond its borders and scope of understanding makes the event stand as an example of the futility of human attempts at a penetration into the world of Nature made with all the preconceptions behind human rationality. The sense of correspondence between the two scenes is palpable here and the resultant impression is that it is the environment of the forest that comes out as the stronger, more dynamic side in the relationship, one more likely to seek an expansion into the realm of the other.

In this way, the series of events which open the narrative become a sort of overture highlighting the tenor of developments to come. If we were to choose to see the events as a backdrop for the relations of the individual characters with the forests they traverse in the course of the narrative, we might say that their most important function is to introduce the theme of an active, sometimes even dramatic, interpenetration of the forest ecosystems and the human civilisation as they become locked in a binary relationship which becomes further set off balance in the course of the unveiling story. Within this relationship it will be the assertive way in which the forest encroaches upon the human space that must be seen as the most important factor distinguishing Martin's secondary world from what we have observed in the case of Tolkien.

As we enter upon the consideration of the various interlaced plotlines which jointly contribute to the grandeur and scope of the narrative, we must first observe that all the interactions between the characters and forest ecosystems happen in the context of the reformulations of the motif of the quest. Now in Martin's treatment of the motif, the quest idea will intermingle the romance tradition of the quest, aiming at a discovery or elevation of one's identity, with the epic tradition of a quest endowed with a wider, communal and historical significance.

We shall first remain in the North of Westeros³⁷ to comment upon three interlaced plotlines which introduce the quest motif in the context of the Haunted Forest – those concerning Jon Snow, Samwell Tarly and Bran Stark. However different these three figures may appear to be, they are but variants of a similar character type – a type which seems naturally predisposed to be placed centrally in a quest narrative; a character, we would say, almost in need of a quest. The three young men represent essentially a type echoing both the innocence of Perceval, the ambition and curiosity of Ywain and the desperation of Launfal and Orfeo – a type naturally poised to benefit from the challenges and benefits of an encounter with a forest ecosystem which would mark their progress in the quest for self-definition and healing of past traumas, which takes them ultimately beyond the individual context and into the wider perspectives of social duty and service to community.

Admittedly, the urge to forge or complete one's individual identity may be a fairly ubiquitous phenomenon among young men entering adulthood and in this the three characters may not particularly distinguish themselves. Yet what sets them apart from the mainstream examples of adolescents who could do with some character formation is that behind each story there is a pattern here, whereby the motif of a trauma of social rejection makes them gravitate towards the forest with its mind-altering propensities.

The motif appears in its most obvious incarnation in the story of Bran Stark.³⁸ Bran's destined and eagerly wished-for career as

³⁷ On the significance of the North in Martin's secondary world compare also Larrington 2016:55-64, 74-97.

³⁸ On the character of Bran see also Jamison 2018: 22-23, 3 and, from the gender perspective, Carroll 2018:58-59, 151-152.

a knight constitutes a natural expression of the eagerness to express one's identity through the possibilities offered by feudal society, and it reflects both the established values and realistic type of social aspiration for the younger son of a powerful baron. The traumatic event which shatters the boy's dreams and hopes for the glories of knighthood leaves Bran with a need to recollect and redefine his personality and social role given his prospects for a life with a severe physical disability.

In the case of Bran's alleged half-brother,³⁹ the stigma of his supposed illegitimate birth marks him from the start for the role of an outcast both within immediate family and in the wider social environment. In this context, Jon Snow's decision to join the Night's Watch is a perfectly rational and understandable decision which offers the prospect of gaining social acceptance within a community where the character's inherited social disadvantages will present the least hindrance. Yet, since the unique status of the Night's Watch is, to some extent, connected with its closeness to the neighbouring giant of a natural habitat, Jon Snow's wish for a new identity takes the character well beyond the predictable range of experience.

In the case of Samwell Tarly⁴⁰ we again find the trauma of being brusquely deflected from a destined social path of noble respectability and catapulted into an awkward position in a social environment which he seems, at least initially, ill-suited for. A disinherited and rejected eldest son of a locally significant noble house, Samwell Tarly similarly enters the forest with both a painful past experience to heal and the need to arrive at a fully consistent and honest self-definition.

If we now consider the three characters in this perspective, they will essentially appear to us as variants of the model of the interaction between the protagonist and the forest ecosystem which we have traced in the context of medieval romance. Consequently, it is in this context that we shall now trace the three characters' dalliance with the grandeur and menace of the ecosystem of the Haunted Forest,

³⁹ For more extensive discussion of the character of Jon Snow see Jamison 2018:98-103.

⁴⁰ For a more extensive discussion of Sam's background story see Carroll 2018: 149-151.

extending countless leagues to the north from the protective boundary of the Wall which divides the familiarity of civilisation from the hostility of wilderness.

Significantly, we are offered the first inside glimpse of the measureless forest extending beyond the Wall as we follow the group of new recruits riding out from Castle Black to say their vows in the weirwood grove located some way into the woods nearby. In the mood and atmosphere of the event we find a lot of elements strongly reminiscent of what would be the equivalent scene in *The Hobbit*:

Once they had entered the forest, they were in a different world. Jon had often hunted with his father and Jory and his brother Robb. He knew the wolfwood around Winterfell as well as any man. The haunted forest was much the same, and yet the feel of it was very different.

A Game of Thrones, 481,

Perhaps it was all in the knowing. They had ridden past the end of the world; somehow that changed everything. Every shadow seemed darker, every sound more ominous. The trees pressed close and shut out the light of the setting sun. A thin crust of snow cracked beneath the hooves of their horses, with a sound like breaking bones. When the wind set the leaves to rustling, it was like a chilly finger tracing a path up Jon's spine. The Wall was at their backs, and only the gods knew what lay ahead.

A Game of Thrones, 482.

What the account of the Night's Watch entering into the expanses of the Haunted Forest shares with the narrative of the company of a dozen dwarves plus a burglar plunging into the depths of Mirkwood is surely the atmosphere of the gloom of silent hostility. It is evident that the Haunted Forest⁴¹ clearly resembles Mirkwood in the impact it has on the focalising characters. Yet, for all that, the whole spatial context is here substantially different from what we observed in *The Hobbit*, as the Haunted Forest marks here not only the outermost reach of human civilisation, but it also constitutes the ultimate limit of the whole geographic layout of Martin's fictional world. Hence the

⁴¹ See also the discussion of the geography and culture of the territories beyond the Wall in Larrington 2016: 74-97.

way the Haunted Forest is positioned vis-à-vis the world of human civilisation has no equivalent in the whole of the Tolkienian canon because it represents the ultimate outside of the human habitat, extending farther into the north than human knowledge or experience has been able to reach. For this reason, the Haunted Forest is a unique ecosystem which differs significantly from the other forests of Westeros, which are bound on all sides by the human habitat and, as we have just seen, this circumstance is understandably the first impression Jon Snow has when entering it with among a troop of Watchmen. Consequently its character and role in the narrative is significantly different and this difference finds its manifestation in the specific arrangement of the spatial imagery.

Also the feeling of silent hostility which seems so reminiscent of the fallen forests of the Tolkienian world appears to be based on a distinct set of premises. The menace of Mirkwood or the Old Forest consisted in drawing the intruding observer away from the soothing familiarity of the surrounding landscape, anchored in the common spiritual roots of all Creation, into a negative void of darkness, emptiness and decay. The Haunted Forest is, however, dangerous by virtue of its closer, more instinctual contact with some grander, untamed incarnation of the spirituality which it shares with the human-dominated world. Although the weirwood grove which is the destination of the Watchmen is located outside the boundaries of human civilisation, on this solemn occasion it serves as a hierophanic catalyst for a momentous spiritual ceremony. Thus the supernatural with which the Haunted Forest is so imbued appears to be more rooted and more at home in the world of Nature and it is from there that it penetrates in the realm of human civilisation. Hence it is within the natural world that the hierophanic point of contact with the spiritual is located. The sanctity of Nature is thus partially beyond the human scope of perception and to be confronted with it is to be confronted with the eerie sensation of experiencing the intimately familiar in a form intensified and extended beyond any precedent of previous experience:

The sun was sinking below the trees when they reached their destination, a small clearing in the deep of the wood where nine weirwoods grew in a

rough circle. Jon drew in a breath, and he saw Sam Tarly staring. Even in the wolfswood, you never found more than two or three of the white trees growing together; a grove of nine was unheard of. The forest floor was carpeted with fallen leaves, bloodred on top, black rot beneath. The wide smooth trunks were bone pale, and nine faces stared inward. The dried sap that crusted in the eyes was red and hard as ruby. Bowen Marsh commanded them to leave their horses outside the circle. "This is a sacred place, we will not defile it."

A Game of Thrones, 482.

This form of relationship between the human and the natural world with respect to the contact with the spiritual is, needless to say, profoundly different from what we witnessed in the case of Tolkien. Yet it seems, to some extent, to bring us back, by a roundabout way, to the original medieval context of the idea of the marvellous, for it becomes here again disentangled from the "global" spiritual scheme of things, to become once again more of an inherent property of the natural ecosystem. In consequence, the forests of Martin's secondary world are more opportunely positioned to exercise their capacity for serving as a natural environment for characters undergoing a transformative, or a restorative experience than was the case in Tolkien. We might thus say that, in Tolkien's world, no character other than Bilbo is actually elevated to a higher degree of self-awareness or a heightened spiritual standing by virtue of contact with the forest environment, although passage through a forest may contribute to the formative experience of the quest itself. This is because, in the case of Tolkien, no natural ecosystem becomes an active agent in instigating a spiritual transformation without the participation of a representative of a sapient species, because it is only through such a relationship that an element of the world of Nature may participate in this ultimate ontological plane of existence. Another thing is that, as we have already indicated, the heroic quests of Tolkien are directed to goals beyond mere personal development, and so the confrontation with the forest becomes subordinated to that higher purpose. In this context, the confrontations of the individual characters with the forests tend to take the form of trials of personal qualities rather than rearrangements of personality.

Now, in the case of Martin's world, the formative experience brought about by the contact with the forest is the crucial and indispensable prerequisite for the characters' further destined paths of social leadership or communal service, and it is through the confrontation with the forest's marvellous layer that the formation of individual identity is made possible.

As we then enter the Haunted Forest, with the fated expedition force of the Night's Watch set to explore the recent anomalies happening beyond the Wall, we will again be reminded of the inhospitable aura of the wounded ecosystems of Mirkwood or the Old Forest:

By day they followed game trails and streambeds, the "ranger's roads" that led them ever deeper into the wilderness of leaf and root. At night they camped beneath a starry sky and gazed up at the comet. The black brothers had left Castle Black in good spirits, joking and trading tales, but of late the brooding silence of the wood seemed to have sombered them all. Jests had grown fewer and tempers shorter. No one would admit to being afraid – they were men of the Night's Watch, after all – but Jon could feel the unease. Four empty villages, no wildlings anywhere, even the game seemingly fled. The haunted forest had never seemed more haunted, even veteran rangers agreed.

A Clash of Kings, 132.

Yet, the overall context is also quite different here. While Mirkwood constituted a serious obstacle for the company's quest, it does not in any way relate to the quest's aims and objectives. For Lord Commander Mormont and his company of Watchmen, to penetrate into the Haunted Forest in order to lay open its secrets is the avowed objective of the escapade. The challenge which the intrusion constitutes for the habitat is thus more immediate and direct because its purpose is not to pass through the forests, but rather to penetrate ever deeper inside it, and to introduce the rudiments of "civilised" order within its bounds by managing, and possibly eradicating, some of the indigenous wildling population. The important thing to be noticed here is that, although the expedition ends in ruin and tragedy and never comes near the fulfilment of its objectives, exposure to the traumatic experiences in fact fulfils the function of bringing about a formative character development in Jon Snow and Sam Tarly. It thus

becomes a very interesting circumstance that a contrastive parallel is developed here, between the pathetic failure of the human attempt at penetrating, comprehending and, implicitly, appropriating the forest and that forest's success at subjecting its visitors to a transformative experience on its own terms. In consequence it is again the forest that emerges as the stronger side in the interaction with the human world.

Again, we encounter here the familiar motifs which were once developed in the context of the genre of romance. Thus, it is not long until the recruits of the Night's Watch in the Haunted Forest meet an incarnation of the *wodewasa*:

Craster's sheepskin jerkin and cloak of sewn skins made a shabby contrast, but around one thick wrist was a heavy ring that had the glint of gold. He looked to be a powerful man, though well into the winter of his days now, his mane of hair grey going to white. A flat nose and a drooping mouth gave him a cruel look, and one of his ears was missing. So this is a wildling. Jon remembered Old Nan's tales of the savage folk who drank blood from human skulls. Craster seemed to be drinking a thin yellow beer from a chipped stone cup. Perhaps he had not heard the stories.

A Clash of Kings, 224.

The figure of Craster offers a variant of the woodwose type, developed by submerging the stock character into the pattern of references and interconnections woven through the whole of *A Song of Ice and Fire*. Born of a relationship between an anonymous member of the Night's Watch and a wildling woman, rejected by his father's kind, and left to a bizarre mode of existence in a settlement outside the Wall, Craster is a creature of the borderline, being neither a part of the human civilisation south of the Wall, nor yet a member of the wildling communities. His appearance, lifestyle and living environment may be perceived as an amalgam of the wildling and "civilised" ways, but is so in a way that seems, leastwise from the "southern" point of view, to bring the wildling spirit dangerously close to what would be intuitively considered its opposite. Thus for Jon Snow – the focalising character in the scene, the "wildling" attributes of Craster will determine his first immediate impression of the uncanny figure, but a closer look will always bring the recognition of his special status and an uncomfortable impression of eerie familiarity. Consequently,

Craster's monstrosity is essentially the monstrosity of the familiar incarnated in an unexpected, more intense form and in this sense it finds its counterpart in the way the free-growing weirwood groves correspond to the cultivated sanctuaries to be found within the feudal castles of Westeros.

For the Night's Watch the very fact of the need for continued reliance on Craster's hospitality is both an undeniable practical advantage and a sign of the inherent weakness of its position within the Haunted Forest. It is, in fact, his avowed proximity to the standards of the world of civilisation which cause his incestuous and barbaric customs to be viewed with such abhorrence. Craster's custom of marrying his daughters and sacrificing all of his new-born sons to the Others is all the more repellent because they do not constitute habits adopted from the culture of the wildlings, but represent a perversion of the norms and practices of the civilised world south of the Wall. In fact, Craster's treatment of his children amounts to nothing more than a more grotesque version of the destructive egoistic attitude exemplified by most of the fathers of the most noble and respected feudal houses of Westeros. In this sense, Craster's abominable ways provide an unbearably honest mirror to the vices which are, in more subtle forms, ubiquitous across the avowedly civilised feudal world of Westeros. Undeniably, it is an instance of incest that provides the spark for the bloody conflict which engulfs the continent and destroys innumerable lives, while the motif of sons being sacrificed to their fathers' ambition, weakness, fear or lack of judgement determines the fortunes of characters as varied as Tyrion and Jaimie Lannister, Theon Greyjoy, Quentin Martell, Joffrey Baratheon and Robb Stark. Importantly, one may also locate Sam Tarly and Jon Snow⁴² in this category, and this seems to be the reason why it is these two characters who are destined for the encounter with Craster, but not Bran Stark, who could not be associated with this particular motif.

In essence, Craster epitomises the ugly side of the feudal world's collective subconscious and represents its vices in an unsettlingly

⁴² Especially if we see the young man's life under the stigma of bastardry being ultimately traceable to Prince Rhaegar's ill-conceived display of high-minded flamboyance.

vivid and direct manner. If viewed in this way, he becomes Martin's own version of Old Man Willow, an intrinsic borderline being – an unnatural product of failed symbiosis between two distinct habitats and the Haunted Forest's cruelly honest interpretation of the real character of the neighbouring human civilisation. In yet another way, Craster represents the failure of the human world to come to terms and acknowledge its less respectable side, thus his existence becomes another example of futility of any attempt of the civilised world to venture beyond its customary confines into the wilderness outside its natural bounds.

If we were to more closely relate the spell the expedition of the Night's Watch spends at Craster's Keep to the narrative patterns found before in Tolkien, we might indeed discern a correspondence between this particular event and the confrontations the quest fellowships have with other borderline beings like the woodtrolls, Beorn or the Old Man Willow, in the sense that all of them seem to mark the character's first foray beyond the familiar horizon of humanity, which leads them to experience the meanders into which the recognisably rational identity may be led in the wake of being subjected to a prolonged exposure to influences from beyond the scope of humanity, or else how forms of existence alien to humanity may express themselves in recognisably human ways.

Thus the visit to Craster's Keep constitutes the first stage of the ill-fated journey of the Night's Watch expedition force and its symbolic significance may serve as a blueprint for making sense of the subsequent fortunes of the quest. The company of the Night's Watch never penetrates deep into the Haunted Forest. In fact most of the forest's space remains undisturbed by the expedition and, symbolically again, the farthest point that that quest ever reaches is the Fist of the First Men and the remnants of an ancient stronghold of the declined race of the first inhabitants of the region, located at the south-west verge of the Haunted Forest along the course of the Milkwater river. The choice of destination is here surely natural and understandable in terms of basic expediency as the slim defences and strategic location of the hill offer as much advantage as may be hoped for in the midst of inhospitable territory. Yet, it is the symbolic significance of the doomed quest reaching its utmost point at a place

which marks the farthest historical relict of human penetration into the depths of the Haunted Forest that seems to provide the overriding narrative context here:

The hill offered commanding views, and the slopes were precipitous to the north and west and only slightly more gentle to the east. Yet as the dusk deepened and darkness seeped into the hollows between the trees, Jon's sense of foreboding grew. This is the haunted forest, he told himself. Maybe there are ghosts here, the spirits of the First Men. This was their place, once.

A Clash of Kings, 317.

In an obvious way, the Night's Watch stay at the Fist marks the limit of their penetration into the primeval past, but at the present point in history it proves to exert the Watchmen's physical and mental powers beyond limits, before the whole expedition force is routed and decimated by a sudden onslaught of the Others. Before the merciless immune system of the Haunted Forest succeeds not only at physically obliterating any military capabilities of the force of the Night's Watch, but also destroying its spirit, sense of duty, cohesion and loyalty, we are offered a view of the full expanse of the ruthless ecosystem, which helps to see the doomed Night's Watch quest in relation to the mighty bulk of the natural habitat it seeks to appropriate:

Clambering atop the piled rocks, Jon gazed off toward the setting sun. He could see the light shimmering like hammered gold off the surface of the Milkwater as it curved away to the south. Upriver the land was more rugged, the dense forest giving way to a series of bare stony hills that rose high and wild to the north and west. On the horizon stood the mountains like a great shadow, range on range of them receding into the bluegrey distance, their jagged peaks sheathed eternally in snow. Even from afar they looked vast and cold and inhospitable.

Closer at hand, it was the trees that ruled. To south and east the wood went on as far as Jon could see, a vast tangle of root and limb painted in a thousand shades of green, with here and there a patch of red where a weirwood shouldered through the pines and sentinels, or a blush of yellow where some broadleaves had begun to turn. When the wind blew, he could hear the creak and groan of branches older than he was. A thousand leaves fluttered,

and for a moment the forest seemed a deep green sea, storm-tossed and heaving, eternal and unknowable.

A Clash of Kings, 317.

The breath-taking view helps realise the inherent futility of any human attempt at conquering, managing, or even comprehending the enormous ecosystem in which the quest becomes submerged, and it also illustrates how insignificant the distance which the Night's Watch was allowed to penetrate into the Haunted Forest really is. Indeed, it becomes apparent how pathetically insignificant the achievements of the Night's Watch actually are in comparison with the sheer size of the forest. It also becomes apparent that the Haunted Forest's position at the farthest reach of the narrative space is a vital element in conveying the impression of its imposing size and unconquerable resilience, as no other forests of *A Song of Ice and Fire* remain so untarnished by their relationship with the civilised world.

It is through scenes like these that the Haunted Forest is allowed to come to the forefront of the narrative, asserting its own presence as a causative force and a character in its own right. It also seems that this impression is strengthened by the intertextual link which may be easily noticed between Jon Snow's vision of the Haunted Forest from atop the Fist of the First Men and Bilbo's attempt at acquiring some space orientation on the way through Mirkwood by climbing the oak tree near its easternmost rim. Although the view of the endless canopy of countless trees extending virtually to the horizon marked by the mountain range of the Thenn region is strongly reminiscent of the view that greets the heroic hobbit atop the oak, it must also be borne in mind that what Bilbo sees is in fact an optical illusion which might be filed under the sullen forest's array of beguiling magical defences, whereas what Jon is allowed to see is the actual view of a much larger forest ecosystem. It appears that the intertextual connection with its underlying contrast is designed to strengthen the overpowering impression of silent grandeur which the Haunted Forest impressed upon the character and it also foreshadows a more direct intertextual relationship between what happens in the Haunted Forest and the Tolkienian tradition.

It is also at the Fist of the First Men, shortly before Jon Snow and Sam Tarly part company to pursue their respective quests, that the forest begins to come even more alive in the imagery of the narrative, as the reader is introduced to what will constitute the most consistently used image in Martin's reservoir of anthropomorphic images concerning the world of Nature:

The trees stood beneath him, warriors armored in bark and leaf, deployed in their silent ranks awaiting the command to storm the hill. Black, they seemed... it was only when his torchlight brushed against them that Jon glimpsed a flash of green.

A Clash of Kings, 321.

The comparison of the trees surrounding the Night' Watch encampment atop the Fist to soldiers standing guard may be taken, at this first instance, to represent a hint of threat and a foreshadowing of the impending menace, but, as shall shortly be seen, the introduction of the mental association between the trees and soldiers implicit in the image will serve to evoke multiple shades of meaning from the setting of the story throughout the whole course of the narrative, as it will become the primary marker of the fusion of the environment of the forest with that of the human civilisation.

It is also at this moment in the narrative that the respective transformations of identity begin for Jon Snow and Samwell Tarly and, as the personal challenges are distinct here, the two characters are destined to face the formative experiences separately. As we have said in the context of the genre of romance, behind the character's encounter with the environment of the forest typically lies a failure to fulfil a destined social role, or a failure to meet a social obligation. In the case of Jon Snow the stigma of bastardry makes the character develop a trauma relating to social identity and the sense of belonging to a community. All this causes Jon to develop a tendency to sympathise with those similarity branded with the sigma of exclusion, as may be well observed in his initial support for Sam. In this context the challenges Jon meets in the Haunted Forest appear to be almost purposefully designed to test the strength of his communal identity, but also to test his ability to measure the limits of personal

commitment against his integrity as a member of the group which has a claim to his underlying loyalty.

It is thus again in the extreme conditions of the natural environment positioned outside the mundane confines of civilisation that a character is faced with a series of trials designed to help him develop a new identity and let go of the devils of the past. The whole narrative sequence – of Jon capturing Ygritte and then letting her go unharmed, his strategic killing of Qhorin Halfhand, the act of his apparent joining of the wildling community and his breaking of the Night's Watch chastity vows, and finally his dramatic defection to rejoin his fellowship at Castle Black – is possible for Jon Snow to experience only in the forest habitat, as it makes use of the traditional propensity of the forest environment to use the inherent loosening and resultant indeterminacy of personal identity inflicted upon the character by the nature of the outside habitat to rearrange the character's mental frame. In this context, Jon Snow's subsequent championing of the wildling community appears to be the outcome of a constructive mental development whereby the character's potential weakness stemming from the trauma of social exclusion becomes the engine of his ability to redefine social relations within his native community, i.e. the Night's Watch.

In this whole process the Haunted Forest seems to play an active part and Jon Snow's dramatic progression through the consecutive stages of acquiring the singular social consciousness is mirrored in his relationship with the ecosystem he is immersed in. Already during the sojourn with Qhorin at the Skirling Pass the forest opens a new layer to the perception of the internal focaliser:

The Skirling Pass was really a series of passes, a long twisting course that went up around a succession of icy wind-carved peaks and down through hidden valleys that seldom saw the sun. Apart from his companions, Jon had glimpsed no living man since they'd left the wood behind and begun to make their way upward. The Frostfangs were as cruel as any place the gods had made, and as inimical to men. The wind cut like a knife up here, and shrilled in the night like a mother mourning her slain children. What few trees they saw were stunted, grotesque things growing sideways out of cracks and fissures. Tumbled shelves of rock often overhung the trail, fringed with hanging icicles that looked like long white teeth from a distance.

Yet even so, Jon Snow was not sorry he had come. There were wonders here as well. He had seen sunlight flashing on icy thin waterfalls as they plunged over the lips of sheer stone cliffs, and a mountain meadow full of autumn wildflowers, blue coldsnaps and bright scarlet frostfires and stands of piper's grass in russet and gold. He had peered down ravines so deep and black they seemed certain to end in some hell, and he had ridden his garron over a wind-eaten bridge of natural stone with nothing but sky to either side. Eagles nested in the heights and came down to hunt the valleys, circling effortlessly on great blue-grey wings that seemed almost part of the sky. Once he had watched a shadowcat stalk a ram, flowing down the mountainside like liquid smoke until it was ready to pounce.

A Clash of Kings, 457.

It is in fact one of the most important characteristics of the Haunted Forest that it seems capable of unveiling ever newer layers and perspectives for the observing character in a way which corresponds both to their physical condition and mental attitudes. This element finds no parallel in Tolkien's reservoir of narrative strategies, and this fact seems to be not merely the outcome of the difference in focalisation. The independent link which the world of Nature enjoys in Martin with the spiritual dimension of reality allows it to function as a more autonomous entity in relation to the characters' perception and consequently the ontological status of the Haunted Forest is more deeply anchored in the fictional reality than the perception of the individual focaliser-characters is able to fathom. It is this circumstance which makes it possible for the formative experiences of the characters to happen against the background of the forest setting.

It is well visible from the passage above that, as Jon Snow leaves the main force of the Night's Watch, his perception becomes immersed in contemplation of the natural landscape to the point that his amassed recollection of its collective wonders begins to approximate an externally focalised view. The impression created is duly that of one's consciousness being dissipated and effectively lost against the grandeur and organic unity of the natural ecosystem.

Another testimony to the gradual transformation of Jon's perceptive powers, his evolution of the mode of contact with whatever in the natural world lies beyond the scope of ordinary human perception, is the fact that the hitherto practically minded character begins to

experience visionary warg dreams in which his perception becomes entangled in the sensory reality of his direwolf – Ghost. As the dream experience takes Jon Snow beyond the confines of his individual consciousness and makes him experience a sensation of mental proximity with other members of the direwolf pack, there is a palpable sense in the passage that the character comes into contact with the marvellous layer of the forest ecosystem and that the transformation of his cognitive powers is a result of the transformative abilities of the habitat in which he is currently resident. As the outstretching of cognitive powers opens Jon’s perception to a different plane of reality, he is made to experience a vision which takes him beyond the limitations of space and time and into a direct contact with Bran Stark, already installed in his role as the Greenseer:

A weirwood.

It seemed to sprout from solid rock, its pale roots twisting up from a myriad of fissures and hairline cracks. The tree was slender compared to other weirwoods he had seen, no more than a sapling, yet it was growing as he watched, its limbs thickening as they reached for the sky. Wary, he circled the smooth white trunk until he came to the face. Red eyes looked at him. Fierce eyes they were, yet glad to see him. The weirwood had his brother’s face.

A Clash of Kings, 474.

Although the immediate context of the visionary experience is to convey an urgent warning against the approach of the wildling host, for which Jon is temporarily lent access to Ghost’s sensory perception, the mode in which the whole experience is conveyed provides a glimpse of the multi-layered structure of the ecosystem which appears to encompass levels of reality existing beyond the boundaries of individual human cognition. It thus appears that the Haunted Forest has over centuries developed into a collective organism capable of preserving a specific form of a conscious interaction with the reality of space and time which extends immeasurably beyond the sensory and mental capabilities of an individual creature. It is this layer of reality which is consequently open to the forest’s collective perception, that constitutes the layer of the marvellous to the individual cognition of a human character – as such, it must be noticed that the

whole concept approximates the medieval model neatly enough to be justifiably accepted as its direct modern derivative and reformulation.

As Jon Snow becomes gradually more challenged by the consecutive shifts of identity which he undergoes, his individual perception and sense of identity becomes sucked into the impersonal objectivity of the forest and it will, in consequence, temporarily disengage the character from his former self:

A wind sighed through the trees, rich with the smell of pine needles, tugging at his faded blacks. Jon could see the Wall looming high and dark to the south, a great shadow blocking out the stars. The rough hilly ground made him think they must be somewhere between the Shadow Tower and Castle Black, and likely closer to the former. For days they had been wending their way south between deep lakes that stretched like long thin fingers along the floors of narrow valleys, while flint ridges and pine-clad hills jostled against one another to either side. Such ground made for slow riding, but offered easy concealment for those wishing to approach the Wall unseen. For wildling raiders, he thought. Like us. Like me.

A Storm of Swords, I, 378.

Although the undermining of the individual identity which Jon effectively experiences in the Haunted Forest may for the moment aggravate the sense of social exclusion which has already marked the character's relationships in the civilised world, it may be seen that the realignment of self-awareness bears all the markings of the healing spell of madness induced by contact with the forest's marvellous layer, which once fulfilled so effectively the role of a therapeutic catalyst allowing the romance character to renew his social function in the community with a newly-found purpose. The reason why the joining of the band of outlaws does not fulfil a similar function for the very similar character of Túrin Turambar is that, in Tolkien's secondary world, the world of Nature is too dependent upon the world of men in matters of spirit to independently perform such a treatment on the member of a rational species.

As the challenges which the characters undergo in the Haunted Forest turn out to be very neatly related to their individual needs, Jon Snow is predictably spared the trial of martial courage which the confrontation with the Others at the Fist of the First Men will inevitably

entail. The fact that the dramatic circumstances of the desperate fight and subsequent escape from the clutches of the impossibly invincible species will require of Samwell Tarly to outdo himself in performing the feat of transforming a paroxysm of fear into an exceptional act of courage is here evidently another instance of the transformative possibilities of an outside environment:

The fear that filled Sam then was worse than any fear he had ever felt before, and Samwell Tarly knew every kind of fear.

...

Do it now. Stop crying and fight, you baby. Fight, craven. It was his father he heard, it was Alliser Thorne, it was his brother Dickon and the boy Rast. Craven, craven, craven. He giggled hysterically, wondering if they would make a wight of him, a huge fat white wight always tripping over its own dead feet. Do it, Sam.

A Storm of Swords, I, 175.

Sam Tarly's dramatic confrontation with the Other is, as seems emphatically implied here, to be primarily seen as a cleansing experience, potentially allowing the character to mentally disengage from the stigma of physical and mental inferiority and the resultant low self-esteem. Although it never fully rehabilitates Sam in his social standing, it does nevertheless transform "Ser Piggy" into "Sam the Slayer" within the closer circle of his associates in the Night's Watch, and, more importantly, it does significantly improve Sam's self-esteem. This shift of identity in itself constitutes another of the intertextual connecting points between Martin and the Tolkienian tradition, as it obviously echoes Sam Gamgee's metamorphosis from "the fat hobbit" into "Sam the Elf-warrior". Moreover, as both respective characters are ultimately variants of the stock character of Sam the Faithful Servant which has originated from Dickens's *Pickwick Papers*, the steady current of correspondences which underlies the two characters' narrative roles will, of course, have the effect of further reinforcing the link.

Thus, the whole event of killing the Other is arguably the closest we come to a moment in Martin's narrative where the obvious intertextual correspondence to the work of Tolkien actual helps bring out the right connotation for the full appreciation of the significance of the scene in the context of the heroic tradition.

If we relate Samwell's act of unexpected bravery purely to the context of the forest environment we would naturally connect it with Bilbo's stabbing of the giant spider in Mirkwood, yet the passage seems equally reminiscent of Samwise Gamgee's stabbing of Shelob in the underground passes in of the Ephel Dúath mountain range with the very same sword. To thus extend the formal preconditions of the required setting to "the wilderness of the outside" will allow us to see the three episodes as incarnations of the same narrative pattern. In all three cases, a transformative act of courage is directly followed by an act of active help rendered to those in need around the character. More specifically, the succour rendered by the newly nobilitated hero consists in successfully escorting or otherwise facilitating the escape of those under his protection from the outside environment and into the safety of a potentially safer habitat. Thus Bilbo not only saves and rescues the dwarves from the clutches of the spider colony, but undergoes a great deal of sacrifice to free the company from their captivity with the wood elves, Sam Gamgee proceeds to rescue Frodo from the captivity at the Tower of Cirith Ungol, and Samwell Tarly ushers Gilly, one of Craster's unfortunate daughter-brides, to the chance of a better life on the other side of the Wall.

It will take no particular stretch of imagination to see this narrative pattern as a derivation from the romance tradition. It is indeed enough to recall in this context the rescue of Dame Heurodis by Sir Orfeo, or Sir Ywain rescuing the offspring of the local lord from the clutches of the giant, becoming a champion for the falsely accused Lunet, or rescuing the prisoners of the Castle of Heavy Sorrow. The healing effects of the mental reshuffle which invariably follows in the wake of successfully standing up to the heroic trial seems to be best reflected in activities of this sort not just because they constitute fit examples of acting on the strength of a proper ethical conviction, but also because they testify to the character's effectively changing his relationships with his environment by regaining control over it. This allows the character to act with a renewed clarity of purpose, free from the burdens of the failures of the past. In this sense, the mental purification or elevation causes the atonement for the shortcomings of the past to be so effective.

In the case of Samwell Tarly, we may discern a specially clear symbolic pattern where the character's decision to succour a damsel in distress, apart from being an act of heroic kindness, is simultaneously a way to atone for the mental scars his father's rejection has caused him to bear. In this context the undeniably symbolic significance of the death of Craster himself becomes clearly visible as, with the demise of the monstrous figure, the spectre of the perversion of fatherhood may be laid to rest. Samwell's embracement of the role of a protector and a father-figure to a pair of unfortunate creatures whose only claim to protection lies in being right at the verge of humanity is, in the context of immediate personal danger, no less heroic than killing the Other, but the first action evidently had to precede the second, and the cathartic character of the forest setting appears to be an indispensable element in both as it helps to reset the mind into following new alternative patterns of behaviour.

Finally, the crucial thing about Jon Snow and Samwell Tarly is that, after emerging from the forest environment, both characters become immersed in their respective social missions. As Jon Snow finds renewed purpose in serving the Night's Watch community as Lord Commander and Samwell undertakes his studies in Oldtown with the intention of becoming a maester, we may fully appreciate how the formative experiences in the Haunted Forest must have contributed to the characters' transition from being potentially ill-equipped to perform a valuable service to their community into more mature individuals fulfilling their potential in the service of others.

Consequently, we may say that, in the context of the two figures, the romance narrative model of the characters' therapeutically transformative encounter with the forest environment is essentially reiterated in a form which stands in close relation to the classic examples of medieval texts, in the context of which the narrative motif had once been formulated. In fact Martin's use of the pattern reminiscent of the romance narratives in the case of Jon Snow and Samwell Tarly may serve as a backdrop against which one may appreciate the more nuanced approach applied in the case of the other characters.

Of these, the character of Bran Stark will evidently relate most closely to the already discussed template, and is also an example of another quest journey into the Haunted Forest. We have already

remarked on the similarities existing between the life stories of the three characters before their ventures into the forest environment and on how the idea of social exclusion prepares the ground for ushering in the familiar narrative model of a transformative experience in the outside space of the forest ecosystem.

In this context it cannot but be seen as symbolically significant that, immediately before passing the boundary between the human and the forest habitat, Bran is made to encounter Samwell Tarly and Jon Snow. The contact made with Jon is arguably less direct of the two, for it takes place when Bran, hidden inside the Queenscrown tower, is accidentally able, by virtue of his skin-changing abilities, to render help to Jon in his dramatic confrontation with the wildlings. The meeting with Sam Tarly takes the form of a more conscious encounter and it takes place in the abandoned Night's Watch castle of Nightfort, where Samwell escorting Gilly and her child beyond the dangers of the Haunted Forest accidentally runs into the company escorting Bran on his mission to find the Three-eyed Crown.

The symbolism immanent in the contrast between the two scenes has its roots in the person of Queen Alysanne Targaryen and her visit to the North two hundred years before. As Queen Alysanne seems in many ways to exemplify the pinnacle of Targaryen rule in Westeros and consequently the model of the human culture which flowered here in the neighbourhood of the world of Nature, so her instinctively negative attitude towards the ancient fortress surrounded by a mist of legends and semi-historical accounts stands in a symbolic contrast with the tower which bears her name in grateful memory of the visit the queen once paid to the village community. Perhaps Queen Alysanne's intuitive dislike of the place and complaints of "a darkness there" and "a taste in the air" (*Fire and Blood*, 265) are the best testimony of the unique status of Nightfort as a point of entrance into the different dimension of reality which the Haunted Forest in many ways represents. It is already when we accompany Bran, the Reed siblings and Hodor on their first entry into the ruined castle that we may see how the two habitats merge here as the forest makes its encroaches upon what once was a seat of human civilisation and is now abandoned to mark its outermost limit:

"It is only another empty castle," Meera Reed said as she gazed across the desolation of rubble, ruins, and weeds.

No, thought Bran, it is the Nightfort, and this is the end of the world.

...

The yards were small forests where spindly trees rubbed their bare branches together and dead leaves scuttled like roaches across patches of old snow. There were trees growing where the stables had been, and a twisted white weirwood pushing up through the gaping hole in the roof of the burned kitchen.

A Storm of Swords, I, 514.

Yet the crucial thing to notice at this point is that, while the natural vegetation of the world of Nature from beyond the Wall is able to expand into what once was a human habitat, the other, marvellous layer of the Haunted Forest never seeks to extend and establish itself beyond the space where the forest's natural ecosystem dominates. Thus Coldhands, the enigmatic guide who will become the questing fellowship's guide and defender on their journey beyond the Wall, is not allowed passage outside the boundary of the Haunted Forest because his existence seems to depend upon the marvellous layer of reality which may only be conjured up within the organic space of that forest's ecosystem:

"He's dead." Bran could taste the bile in his throat. "Meera, he's some dead thing. The monsters cannot pass so long as the Wall stands and the men of the Night's Watch stay true, that's what Old Nan used to say. He came to meet us at the Wall, but he could not pass. He sent Sam instead, with that wildling girl."

A Dance with Dragons, 70.

If, as seems both justified and plausible, we interpret Coldhands as the prolonged form of existence bestowed upon Benjen Stark for fulfilment of the purpose which once defined his identity as a living being, we may be brought closer to the understanding of the mechanism by means of which the collective consciousness of the forest is able to reformulate the very boundaries of individual life and death. It seems that the nature of the mechanism corresponds in its essence to the symbiotic systems of mutually supportive relationships

developed in natural forests by different varieties of tree colonies. Thus in the natural ecosystem it is common for individual organisms which are nominally dead (being too old, damaged, or sick to conduct photosynthesis) to be supported by the collective root system of the other trees and supplied with nourishment for a lengthy period of time by the healthy representatives of the same species because their prolonged existence is instinctually perceived as beneficial by the colony as it contributes to the preservation of the integrity and stability of ecosystem's microclimate. This phenomenon, referred to as mycorrhizal networks, or the "Wood Wide Web" in popular jargon, has only recently received scientific verification,⁴³ but it seems that, in the forests of George R. R. Martin's secondary universe, it has been allowed to encompass other forms of life on which similar modes of symbiosis have not been bestowed in the primary world. While the rationale behind the existence of the life-supporting mechanism relies on the authority of modern science, in Martin's secondary world it appears to be used to justify and reinforce the medieval idea of the marvellous, for it has the effect of involving the individual life of characters in a layer of reality which expands beyond their individual experience or cognitive possibilities, sometimes even extending and penetrating beyond the natural boundaries of life and death.

As this marvellous reality is, however, fostered by the forest's unique character of its organic life as a unified entity, its principles and powers do not normally extend beyond the boundaries of the natural habitat. Therefore the figure of Coldhands is crucial to the understanding not only of the rationale behind the continued life of Ser Brynden the Greenseer, but also characters such as Beric Dondarrion.

In this context it becomes important that the journey of Bran Stark⁴⁴ into the Haunted Forest is, from its start, markedly different from the respective journeys of Jon Snow and Samwell Tarly. It begins

⁴³ For the origin of the term see Giovannetti et al. (2006). For the newest scientific consensus on the phenomenon see the recent publications by Gorzelak et al. (2015) and Steidinger/Crowther/Liang (2019).

⁴⁴ For more discussion on the character see Jamison 2018: 38-3, Carroll 2018: 58, 113.

seemingly outside any immediately spatial context, with recurrent visions of the Three-eyed Crow and the sense of mission and responsibility which the insistent dream encounters gradually impose on the young character. This motif is further reinforced by the arrival of the Reed siblings and their progressively growing importance in continuously providing assistance and a sort of spiritual guidance for Bran on his otherwise lonely journey. Thus the visions of Bran and the prophetic “green dreams” of Jojen Reed create, from the beginning, a different perspective for the quest the characters embark on. Another important element in this context is Bran’s ability to master skin-changing, whereby, by being temporarily lent Summer’s perceptive skills, the young lord develops an exceptionally sensitive and intimate appreciation of forest environment acquired in a cognitive mode which also extends beyond individual sensory perception:

Sometimes he could sense them, though, as if they were still with him, only hidden from his sight by a boulder or a stand of trees. He could not smell them, nor hear their howls by night, yet he felt their presence at his back... all but the sister they had lost. His tail drooped when he remembered her. Four now, not five. Four and one more, the white who has no voice. These woods belonged to them, the snowy slopes and stony hills, the great green pines and the golden leaf oaks, the rushing streams and blue lakes fringed with fingers of white frost.

A Storm of Swords, I, 131.

This circumstance determines the different status of Bran’s quest as it constitutes the sole example of any of the characters making contact with the marvellous layer of the forest’s reality prior to actually penetrating the physical confines of the natural forest habitat. Also we need to remember here the implicit, but emphatic, contrast in the way Bran enters the Haunted Forest as compared to Jon and Samwell, for while the latter two ride out through the main northern gate of the Castle Black complex, Bran and the company step into the Haunted Forest through a magical gate hidden in the underground recesses of the derelict Nightfort.

From this moment Bran’s journey seems to take place on a different layer of reality from the one on which the doomed Night’s Watch exclusion previously happened (and these two are opportunely kept

apart by being narrated as separate, internally focalised, interlaced plotlines). While we were able to follow the route taken by Lord Commander Mormont's expedition force on map with a large degree of precision, the course of Bran's journey does not seem to relate to the geographical perspective in any remotely similar way. While the company of the Night's Watch merely skims the south-western rim of the Haunted Forest, never in fact penetrating significantly into its depths, the quest of Bran Stark seems to take place without reference to any spatial coordinates, even before it reaches the Wall, while the impression progressively created in the narrative is one of incessantly pressing ever deeper in the core of the forest:

No roads ran through the twisted mountain valleys where they walked now. Between the grey stone peaks lay still blue lakes, long and deep and narrow, and the green gloom of endless piney woods. The russet and gold of autumn leaves grew less common when they left the wolfswood to climb amongst the old flint hills, and vanished by the time those hills had turned to mountains. Giant grey-green sentinels loomed above them now, and spruce and fir and soldier pines in endless profusion. The undergrowth was sparse beneath them, the forest floor carpeted in dark green needles. When they lost their way, as happened once or twice, they need only wait for a clear cold night when the clouds did not intrude, and look up in the sky for the Ice Dragon. The blue star in the dragon's eye pointed the way north, as Osha told him once.

A Storm of Swords, I, 230.

The narrative method here is one whereby characters' progress through the wilderness is dissipated in the deliberately generalised description of the surrounding landscape thereby disconnecting Bran's point of view as the focaliser from any reference to objective geographical coordinates. As the course of the company's journey is juxtaposed solely against their northward destination point, the sense of concentricity, of converging on the northernmost point in space, becomes the predominant impression evoked by the passages describing Bran's progress through the surrounding countryside.

Another crucial thing about the above passage is that we find here another example of the persistent association developed throughout Martin's narrative between the image of the trees and that

of soldiers. Indeed, a pun on the double meaning of “sentinel” is used on numerous occasions in *A Song of Ice and Fire* and, as shall be seen, the frequent use of the collocation “sentinel and soldier pines” succeeds in bestowing upon the phrase the kind of authoritative sonority reminiscent of the deterministic force that kenning-descended formulaic phrases always had in oral heroic verse.

After the company enters the Haunted Forest their passage is described only through reference to the immediate surroundings and the sensation we experience in the narrative is one of lacking any point of reference and not having any reliable sense of distances between elements of the surrounding environment:

The water was frozen, and the snow had been falling for so long that Bran had lost count of the days, turning the lake into a vast white wilderness. Where the ice was flat and the ground was bumpy, the going was easy, but where the wind had pushed the snow up into ridges, sometimes it was hard to tell where the lake ended and the shore began. Even the trees were not as infallible a guide as they might have hoped, for there were wooded islands in the lake, and wide areas ashore where no trees grew.

A Dance with Dragons, 117.

As can be seen, we get no panoramic views comparable with Jon Snow’s vision of the northernmost expanses of unmeasurable wilderness extending beyond the Haunted Forest. While we are steadily exposed to the sensation of penetration ever deeper into the depths of the Haunted Forest, it is in fact impossible to refer to any precise location points in the way we did while following the course of Jon and Samwell’s personality-transforming experiences. It becomes evident that the predominant sense evoked by the description of Bran’s quest into the Haunted Forest is one of going ever deeper into the core of a concentrically conceived spatial entity which one cannot traverse across, but may only be submerged into.

Thus Bran’s quest seems to proceed on a different spatial plane and a different ontological layer than the journeys of Jon and Samwell. The contrast is here essentially between, on the one hand, a spatial layout which fits the area occupied by the Haunted Forest into a pre-existing geographical template where it exists side by side with other spatial entities and, on the other, a model whereby the forest is

a concentrically expanding entity of undetermined dimensions seemingly unrelated to any predetermined outside orientation points and in no objective relation to the neighbouring spatial entities.

It is obvious that, while the first model basically reflects the modern space perception, the second is indebted to the medieval mode of space orientation. Crucially, the coexistence of these two models within the narrative creates a sensation very much akin to that we have observed in Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess*. Here, like in Chaucer's narrative poem, the forest seems capable of generating multifarious spatial planes, existing simultaneously within its ecosystem. It seems consequently as if it is only by entering the Haunted Forest through the magic gate at Nightfort that one may find oneself on a spatial plane which has direct contact with the supernatural dimension, and it is on this plane that one may reach the secret abode of the Children of the Forest. It is by developing this arrangement that the forest seeks to protect the precarious existence of the only intelligent species which has developed a symbiotic relationship with its ecosystem.

The simultaneous planes seem to exist not only within different spatial dimensions, but also on a different temporal level, for the Children of the Forest appear to have developed a special relationship with time, which locates them outside its linear progress which has determined the individual fortunes and historical upheavals of the human civilisation outside the forest environment. In fact both the exceptional longevity of the species and the unchanging character of their communal life is the effect of their symbiosis with the forest, in which they naturally take after the character of the whole ecosystem. Now, as we have said, the forest ecosystem is defined by relationships of mutually beneficial web of symbiotic relationships rather than rivalry. In this sense in the Children of the Forest we have a case of a rational species which has adapted itself to become a junior partner in a relationship with a natural ecosystem. In this respect the Children's intimate relationship with the Haunted Forest must be clearly distinguished from the way the wildling communities make use of the forest environment. The wildlings do not enter here into a symbiosis with the forest, but merely seem to readapt and compromise their civilised identity in exchange for the benefits of

living within the habitat and using its resources. Consequently, the wildlings never become part of the ecosystem in any other than parasitic way, and they are still defined by their link with, and descent from, the civilised world south of the Wall, while no such link exists in the case of the Children. Consequently the Haunted Forest seems to keep the two kinds of beings apart from each other on adjacent, but distinct spatial planes and no direct contact is made between the two communities.

In this sense one may speak of an underlying similarity between the Children and the Others, for it seems that the Haunted Forest makes use of both species in their relationship with civilisation of the rational beings which spreads outside its bounds. As has already been said, the Others, who represent the unpremeditated instinctual destructiveness in their relations with the human species, do no harm to the forest ecosystem itself, and appear to function in a way corresponding to a natural immune system. In this capacity the Others also remain in a symbiotic relationship with the Haunted Forest. Like the medieval elves they ultimately derive from, the Others represent and embody the protective powers of the forest ecosystem and they derive their identity and character from the environment they serve, which means that they understand and protect the integrity of their symbiotic environment, but have no notion of mercy or remorse, for these are distinctly human concepts. Also, in their use of the wights, the Others subscribe to nothing more than an outrageously inhuman application of the principle that all vestiges of life may be prolonged in the interest of the habitat. The coexistence of species as different as Children of the Forest and the Others in the same ecosystem contributes to the sensation created in Martin's narrative that the complexity of life within a large natural environment extends well beyond the human scope of comprehension.

From this perspective, the perceived sudden increase in the threat the Others pose for the wildling communities functioning north to the Wall might be seen as nothing more than a periodic cleansing of organisms which are essentially parasites on the forest ecosystem, and it may be seen as related to the natural course of seasons on which the life cycles of the forest clearly depend. It is only when we consider the sudden upsurge in the Others' hostile

activities in the context of the progressive decay and disintegration of the human civilisation outside the forest, which is the outcome of the war engulfing the continent of Westeros, that we may take it as a sinister testimony to a universal upheaval in the underlying balance of Nature.

The question which naturally presents itself at this stage is what kind of symbiotic service the Children of the Forest are able to render to the forest ecosystem. Arguably we have no better way of fathoming the issue than to consider the case of Brynden the Greenseer, whose meeting with Bran becomes the fulfilment of the quest which has led the young nobleman into the heart of the Haunted Forest:

“Most of him has gone into the tree,” explained the singer Meera called Leaf. “He has lived beyond his mortal span, and yet he lingers. For us, for you, for the realms of men. Only a little strength remains in his flesh. He has a thousand eyes and one, but there is much to watch. One day you will know.”

(...)

“What do the trees remember?” “The secrets of the old gods,” said Jojen Reed.(...)

“Truths the First Men knew, forgotten now in Winterfell ... but not in the wet wild. We live closer to the green in our bogs and crannogs, and we remember. Earth and water, soil and stone, oaks and elms and willows, they were here before us all and will still remain when we are gone.”

A Dance with Dragons, 449.

Now in the case of the greenseers, the symbiosis between the representative of the sapient species and the forest environment becomes intimately physical and, in consequence, the lifespan and cognitive powers of one predestined for the role become immeasurably extended as he partakes of the natural longevity of the forest. The price for access to the store of amassed memory preserved by the collective consciousness of the ecosystem is to gradually lose most traits of one's individual identity, as one begins to live on the terms of the vegetative world.

The system of weirwood trees which expands over most of Westeros, and through whose special status and extraordinary cognitive powers access to all events past and present is made possible for

those destined to command the omniscient apparatus, constitutes a unique extension of the Haunted Forest's marvellous layer into the world of human civilisation. It seems to be the result of the symbiotic relationship with the Children of the Forest, who become here a link between the natural world and the world of the other rational species (performing a role which corresponds to the one which the natural scientists attribute to the fungi in the natural forest's system of communication). It appears as if, in return for the continued service which the Children lend to the forest ecosystem, they have been allowed to partake of the natural network which links all the weirwood trees into one enormous reservoir of global cognition. It is through access to this reservoir of collective memory of the past that the Children are able to forge a sense of communal identity, but in this way they also contribute to the fullness of the forest's marvellous reality:

The singers of the forest had no books. No ink, no parchment, no written language. Instead they had the trees, and the weirwoods above all. When they died, they went into the wood, into leaf and limb and root, and the trees remembered.

A Dance with Dragons, 744.

As may be seen here, the Children of the Forest appear to occupy the middle ground between the natural world and the world of human civilisation. On the one hand their sense of identity as a species is based on the rationally conceived consciousness of the past and in this they clearly resemble human societies. On the other hand, in their directly and intimately symbiotic connection and consequent dependence on the natural ecosystem of the forest, the Children would appear to have more in common with the world of Nature.

It seems that, although in Martin's secondary world the natural ecosystems need no guiding presence of a rational species to arrive at the fullness of their natural potential, the presence of a rational species with access to the forest's marvellous layer appears to be beneficial enough for the forest ecosystem to enter into a symbiotic relation with it by lending its mighty cognitive apparatus for the species' continued use. It might be said that, through the symbiosis with the Children, the forest ecosystem has invented a way to know

itself, because in order to make sense of the data available to the weirwood cognitive system the presence of a member of a rational species is evidently needed, in the capacity of the greenseer. Thus if, in some sense, the presence of a rational species is essential to the natural ecosystem, the relationship still possesses no trace of any hierarchical arrangement, but may even be perceived as placing the rational species in the role of the junior partner in the relationship. This is because it is indicated on numerous occasions throughout the narrative that the core of the human civilisation's sense of identity is its consciousness of historical continuity, which comprises the accumulated worth of individual lives and the myths beliefs and ideals which life stories have come to represent for the whole community. If we now consider that the ultimate insight into that reservoir of data is the sole preserve of the greenseer, we may arrive at the conclusion that it is within the Haunted Forest that the core of the collective human consciousness is located. This fact does not appear to stem from any "conscious" initiative of the forest ecosystem, but is really the inevitable outcome of the fact that in Martin's secondary world, the sense of identity of the human civilisation is articulated through a wider sense of historical perspective. The natural ecosystem's increased longevity and capacity to experience time in a mode which extends beyond the experience of individual lifespan make it a natural partner in a symbiotic relationship, whereby access to the marvellous environment is traded for access to a rational consciousness, which contributes to the fullness of the environment's marvellous potential.

Some evident similarity may be found here between the Children of the Forest and Tolkien's Ents, for both species' outlook is directly determined by the oral character of their culture and their intimate link with the vegetative world, which become the defining factors setting them apart from the rest of the rational world. Despite this, we may also see that the relationship between the Ents and the natural world is decisively hierarchical. Despite their closeness to the natural world, the Ents are still defined by their role as the Shepherds of Trees – a role which presupposes a relation of protective service rendered by the superior side in the relationship and not a symbiotic reciprocity.

It is also evident that the Haunted Forest remains throughout the narrative an independent, autonomous entity, with a distinct approach to ethical questions which does not reflect human spirituality. It is yet by virtue of these characteristics that it so elegantly fits into the role of the ultimate outside, where the characters may find an opportune environment for the formative or therapeutic experiences they are in need of undergoing. Thus, in Martin's secondary universe, we may see how the autonomous character of the natural ecosystem's link with the supernatural causes it to be more of an independent, equal partner in its relationship with the human world.

This arrangement means, on the one hand, that we may find here a kind of localised, habitat-specific idea of the marvellous, which is essentially closed to the medieval textual models that its universalised, eschatological variant developed in the work of Tolkien. On the other hand, Martin's idea for the marvellous is to a very substantial degree conditioned by recent concepts which have been put forward by natural scientists as a way to account for the specificity of organic relationships within natural forest ecosystems. In particular we may easily discern the inspiration for the concept of the weirwood system of global perception in the idea of the Wood-Wide-Web which has been proposed as the model for portraying the system of reciprocal sharing of data within the forest environment.

This new model is employed in Martin as a tool for articulating the technical aspects of a mechanism which allows the forest to perform narrative functions parallel to those it performed in the medieval narratives. Its underlying function seems to be to lend veracity to the rationale behind the existence and operation of the forest's marvellous layer in a narrative which is much indebted to the novelistic legacy of formal realism as it is to the style and character of the heroic narratives.

As we have been able to see, the Haunted Forest plays a crucial role in the lives of those of the narrative's characters whose interlaced stories are connected with the North of Westeros. If we now turn our attention to the south of the continent and the other forests which occupy areas within the Seven Kingdoms, we shall be best guided by the already quoted mental assertion of Jon Snow upon entering the

Haunted Forest – that it is a “different world” from the other forest environments he has had a chance to experience.

Indeed the contrast between the Haunted Forest and the other forests of Westeros is positively striking, no less because many of the features and motifs which we have encountered in the context of the northern giant of an ecosystem may be traced in the presentation of the southern forests. On the one side of the contrast we thus have a healthy integral natural ecosystem whose location within the secondary narrative world marks it clearly as the outside with respect to the space occupied by the human civilisation. As the human civilisation is never able to challenge this position, the Haunted Forest constitutes an integral, autonomous environment capable of a relationship with the human-dominated world, but remaining unaffected by the other’s fortunes and upheavals. On the other hand, the forests growing in the southern regions of Westeros are, first, significantly smaller environments, and secondly and more importantly, they are positioned within predominantly human habitats, engulfed by the surrounding centres of human civilisation and the areas of cultivated countryside.

This fact will determine the character of the forests, making them susceptible to the influences, encroachments and invasions of the human world around them and causing them to project a seclusive, sometimes overtly hostile aura aimed at protecting their endangered integrity. It is the gradual encroachment on this integrity that will become the reflection of the progressive breakdown of law, order, relationships and values caused by the war which engulfs the continent.

It is that correspondence that will determine the ultimate identity of the forests of Westeros. Indeed this quality and specific character of the southern forests is most vividly perceived by Asha Greyjoy, who is sentenced to a constant contemplation of the wolfwoods surrounding Winterfell during her forced sojourn at the captured castle of Deepwood Mote:

The sea was closer, only five leagues north, but Asha could not see it. Too many hills stood in the way. And trees, so many trees. The wolfswood, the northmen named the forest. Most nights you could hear the wolves, calling to each other through the dark. An ocean of leaves.

(...)

The quiet of the woods unnerved her. Asha had spent her life on islands and on ships. The sea was never silent. The sound of the waves washing against a rocky shore was in her blood, but there were no waves at Deepwood Motte ... only the trees, the endless trees, soldier pines and sentinels, beech and ash and ancient oaks, chestnut trees and ironwoods and firs. The sound they made was softer than the sea, and she heard it only when the wind was blowing; then the sighing seemed to come from all around her, as if the trees were whispering to one another in some language that she could not understand. Tonight the whispering seemed louder than before. A rush of dead brown leaves, Asha told herself, bare branches creaking in the wind.

A Dance with Dragons, 556-560.

As the ultimate outsider, gnawed upon by a sense of defeat, betrayal and raging homesickness, the royal daughter of Balon Greyjoy offers the most incisive perspective on the exact character of the forests of Westeros. The aura of fierce protectiveness is well visible in Asha's account as is the autonomous, self-sustaining character of the ecosystem and organic interconnection between the countless trees creating an organic network which transforms the very nature of the space the forest occupies. The apparent potential of hostility which the proximity of the forest seems to exude is here not, as is the case in Tolkien, a feature of an ecosystem pushed out of its native balance, but is a predictable outcome of the forest's self-sufficient character. It is a sign of the living organism's natural urge to protect its integrity against any incursion from outside its web of symbiotic relations.

Again we encounter here the variant formulaic phrase of "soldier pines and sentinels" around which the idea of the healthy, resilient core of the forest's defensive capabilities seems to revolve throughout Martin's narrative. As we shall see below, it is also through this reference that the process of the progressive disintegration of the sylvan ecosystems shall be most vividly conveyed.

We shall proceed now further south to concentrate on the forests of the centrally positioned Riverlands and the estuary of the river Trident, as we follow the interlaced storylines of Arya Stark and Brienne of Tarth. Let us begin at the moment when Arya, together with Hot Pie and Gendry, makes her desperate run into the forests surrounding

Harrenhal in the wake of a daring escape from her captivity in the gargantuan castle of ominous reputation. As the company enters ever deeper into the woods we clearly discern the changes brought about by contact with a new environment:

She should be more frightened herself, she knew. She was only ten, a skinny girl on a stolen horse with a dark forest ahead of her and men behind who would gladly cut off her feet. Yet somehow she felt calmer than she ever had in Harrenhal. The rain had washed the guard's blood off her fingers, she wore a sword across her back, wolves were prowling through the dark like lean grey shadows, and Arya Stark was unafraid.

A Storm of Swords, I, 33.

As the resilient younger daughter of Lord Eddard confronts her own identity, she is made aware of the change the new environment is inflicting upon her. The evidently symbolic act of washing the blood of the guard killed in Harrenhal marks the character's transition beyond the traditional ethical limits of the human world and ushers her into an environment where the self-preservation instinct offers unquestioned and unpremeditated justification for acts of violence. The environment of the forest similarly offers an escape from the overwhelmingly oppressive nature of the human world and allows passage into a habitat where the chances of survival are based more on individual mental agility and physical abilities, which makes them also significantly higher than in the castle occupied and currently ruled by some of the most sinister characters in Westeros. This makes Arya⁴⁵ fit into the long tradition of characters seeking refuge from the unbearably oppressive human civilisation into the environment of the forest, but the price for the sojourn in the sanctuary of the forest is also perceptible here from the onset. The mental foray beyond the traditionally human sense of guilt at the killing of the guard who remains, in the individual context, an essentially innocent person makes Arya's experience a nearly schizophrenic sensation of

⁴⁵ On the character of Arya see also Spector (2012: 176-178), in relation to Brienne see Carroll (2018: 72-74), on the evolution of the character see also Jamison (2018: 147-148, 129). About Arya's relation with the environment and her adaptative powers see also Jacoby (2012: 236-249).

duality, of being transformed into something beyond the confines of what is natural for the species and her environment as long as it exists in its normal, healthy condition. It is worth recalling here that it is a parallel sensation to the one experienced by Jon Snow while approaching the Wall in the company of the wildlings.

As Martin's natural world is not bound together with humanity into any spiritual ethical or existential frame, it remains too distinct in character for any representative of the rational species submerged within it to preserve their full mental integrity. Thus the creeping menace of a potentially destructive influence of the forest environment is clearly noticeable in Arya's bemused self-analysis. Subsequently Arya renews her skin-changing abilities and is able to re-establish contact with her direwolf Nymeria:

Her dreams were red and savage. The Mummer's were in them, four at least, a pale Lyseni and a dark brutal axeman from Ib, the scarred Dothraki horse lord called Iggo and a Dornishman whose name she never knew (...) They thought they were hunting her, she knew with all the strange sharp certainty of dreams, but they were wrong. She was hunting them. She was no little girl in the dream; she was a wolf, huge and powerful, and when she emerged from beneath the trees in front of them and bared her teeth in a low rumbling growl, she could smell the rank stench of fear from horse and man alike.

A Storm of Swords, I, 37-38.

Arya's extra-sensory abilities allow us to witness Nymeria, now a leader of a ferocious wolfpack, bring destruction upon an expedition force of the mercenary Brave Companions sent in pursuit of the escapees. We may definitely view the episode in relation to the parallel experience of Jon Snow's visionary dream which marks the onset of his journey into the wild beyond the human environment, but the differences are here no less important. The attack of the wolfpack constitutes an instinctive act of retributive defence, and as such it clearly marks the ecosystem's direct involvement in the human conflict which is a situation markedly different from anything we have witnessed in the context of the Haunted Forest's interaction with the human world. This is because even if we might find a parallel for it in the destruction of the Night's Watch on the Fist of the

First Men, here it is the natural ecosystem itself which is directly involved in the vindictive action. It appears as if the destruction of the natural balance between distinct habitats as well as the extensive actual damage brought about by the war has caused the beleaguered Riverland forest to develop an instinctive hostility towards anyone entering the environment in a mode it deems to be too assertive. It is in this sense that we might see a direct parallel with the likes of Mirkwood and the Old Forest, and indeed the parallel would be the reflection of the similarity in the experiences which the woods covering the Riverlands have in the recent past had with the human civilisation.

The motif of the mutual corruption of the human and the natural environment which is one of the results of the horrors of war becomes the dominant theme through which the character of the southern forests becomes articulated in *A Song of Ice and Fire*. Indeed Arya herself becomes a routine witness of images expressive of this underlying idea, as she does, for instance, travelling through the Riverlands in the uneasy company of Sandor Clegane:

The rain was falling from a black iron sky, pricking the green and brown torrent with ten thousand swords. It must be a mile across, Arya thought. The tops of half a hundred trees poked up out the swirling waters, their limbs clutching for the sky like the arms of drowning men. Thick mats of sodden leaves choked the shoreline, and farther out in the channel she glimpsed something pale and swollen, a deer or perhaps a dead horse, moving swiftly downstream.

A Storm of Swords, I, 444.

For all the acute realism of similar passages, it also becomes evident that the symbolic connotations of its constituent elements play a major part in evoking all its potency. In this context, we come back again to the motif of the anthropomorphic link evoked by the resemblance of trees to human figures. Indeed the motif operates in Martin's narrative as the key element indicating the inherent destructiveness of the two coexisting worlds, colliding into one another in a manner which brings destruction and decay to both of them. As readers become ever more submerged into the progressively worsening decay of the feudal civilisation in Westeros, images exploiting the

underlying correspondence are pressed upon them with ever greater persistence. While in the “sentinel and soldier pines” of the Haunted Forest we had an image of the martial-like prowess of healthy woodland ecosystem standing guard over the developments in the fortunes of the characters, what we encounter in the war-torn Riverlands is a gradual blurring of the distinction between the two wounded environments whose respective integrity has been compromised by the apocalyptic destruction inflicted upon both of them. Following this interpenetration, each of the two environments becomes infected with the disease and decay of the other, while both are locked in an uneasy union of two worlds whose distinctly unique status has been compromised by such forced cohabitation:

Fallen leaves lay thick upon the ground, like soldiers after some great slaughter. A man in patched, faded greens was sitting cross-legged atop a weathered stone sepulcher, fingering the strings of a woodharp.

A Storm of Swords, I, 759.

The above passage, being one of a number making use of the connotation, appears in the context of a scene which brings us once again to the gravestone of King Tristifer IV near Oldstones in the northern Riverlands and ushers us simultaneously into Martin’s adaptation of the outlaw motif as we follow the execution of a son of Lord Walder Frey by the Brotherhood without Banners.

Now the motif of the outlaw, as it is developed in the course of *A Song of Ice and Fire*, is directly rooted in the traditional dichotomy between the social and legal confines of the civilised world and the freedom from the norms and obligations of human society, which is one of the central prerogatives of those who will gravitate to the woodland habitat after being pushed outside their native social milieu. Yet its treatment exhibits considerable subtlety and imaginative scope which allows for the articulation of themes reaching beyond what we find in the medieval models. Thus first we find the motif employed in the form of a contrastive juxtaposition which is used to indicate the extent of the universal subversion of the natural and social order of Westeros in the wake of the protracted conflict. To realise this we need to appreciate the correspondence of two episodes.

The first happens when Bran Stark, together with his brother Robb and Theon Greyjoy, embarks on an excursion to the wolfswood, which is supposed to help Bran's physical and mental recovery from the prolonged coma caused by his accident and fall. While in the wolfswood, Bran is attacked by a band of outlaws comprising wildlings as well as deserters from the Night's Watch, with Osha among them. Bran is saved then by his brother Robb and Theon with the help of the direwolves. The second episode happens after Theon's fateful spell as the ruler of Winterfell. After Bran and Rickon escape, with the help of Osha and Hodor, from their internment in the castle, they themselves become outlaws hunted throughout the wolfswood by Theon. The implicit correspondence between the two events undoubtedly contributes to the articulation of the idea of the breakdown of legal and social order in Westeros and it also represents a case when the disturbance of the natural balance in the human-dominated world invades the forest environment, obliterating any objective distinction between those within and outside the law. In the context of all this, the outlaw fellowship of the Brotherhood without Banners and its leader – Beric Dondarrion⁴⁶ evidently amount to much more than a mere reincarnation of the Robin Hood tradition, although they are clearly that as well.

We first hear of Lord Beric when the young, handsome and sociable nobleman, from an ancient Stormlands house sworn to House Baratheon, arrives in King's Landing for the tournament organised in honour of Lord Eddard Stark's appointment to the position of the Hand of the King. In this initial incarnation, Lord Beric epitomises all the traditional values of the feudal society and effectively embodies all its characteristic charms and splendours. Thus, being a darling of his native environment, he somehow imperceptibly, though inevitably, takes on the role of a natural catalyst for its wholesome condition. Lord Beric is subsequently sent by Lord Eddard to put an end to Ser Gregor Clegane's raiding the Riverland domains of House Tully, an errand on which he comes to represent and embody King Robert's royal justice. Soon Beric's expedition force becomes

⁴⁶ On the character of Dondarrion in relation to Martin's models of the heroic see also Jamison 2018: 38-39, 103.

routed in a battle against Lannister armies and driven to seek refuge in the Riverland forests and continue engaging Ser Gregor's troops by pursuing guerrilla tactics. By the time Arya Stark spends a spell with Lord Beric and the remnant of his soldiers, they have already transformed into a regular underground resistance force confined to a permanent life in the relative security of the woodland areas of the Riverlands. Moreover, as Lord Beric prolongs his existence beyond the natural boundaries of physical life, he is left to linger as an undead shell of a man, obstinately clinging to a hopeless, unnatural form of existence, being repeatedly resuscitated back to life with the help of the quasi-religious powers of the red priest Thoros of Myr, acting in the apparent service of a god Lord Beric himself neither believes in nor respects.

In this context we may see Beric Dondarrion as the ultimate case of the already familiar narrative model whereby a character crosses the boundary into the forest environment in the wake of failing to fulfil a social obligation. Yet no therapeutic transformation, mental atonement or heroic redemption follows here. This is because, unlike the Haunted Forest, the forests of the Riverlands are not healthy integral ecosystems possessed of the native resilience and strength to oversee a process of rearranging a character's personality. Rather, they represent small enclaves restricted by the expansion of the human-dominated world. As such they do not possess a cohesive, integral layer of the marvellous which would have taken the character beyond the post-traumatic crisis of identity.

Despite this, Lord Beric appears affected by the forests' natural aura of longevity and continuity, which separates him from the changing fortunes of the world outside and makes him remain focused on the past that he has brought with himself into the new environment.

Consequently, what happens in Dondarrion's case is in some sense an inversion of the narrative pattern, for it is the submersion of the character in the forest that has the effect of conserving his resolve into a stubborn pursuit of a lost cause beyond all rational probabilities of success and the limits of natural life.

As such the doomed quest of Lord Beric and his companions merely constitutes an invasive incursion of the human world into the forest environment. As the feudal order of the human civilisation of

Westeros is thrown violently out of balance, it ejects Lord Beric, who constitutes its bodily incarnation, into the forest environment. As a result Dondarrion undergoes a unique process which leaves him, at one and the same time, obstinately stuck in his former identity and also profoundly changed by contact with his new habitat:

Dondarrion? Beric Dondarrion had been handsome; Sansa's friend Jeyne had fallen in love with him. Even Jeyne Poole was not so blind as to think this man was fair. Yet when Arya looked at him again, she saw it; the remains of a forked purple lightning bolt on the cracked enamel of his breastplate. "Rocks and trees and rivers, that's what your realm is made of," the Hound was saying. "Do the rocks need defending? Robert wouldn't have thought so. If he couldn't fuck it, fight it, or drink it, it bored him, and so would you... you brave companions."

A Clash of Swords, 319.

Thus on the one hand, Dondarrion remains the only person in Westeros still confirming his allegiance to the dead King Robert and obsessively engaged in the interminable fulfilment of the bequest of the likewise diseased Hand of the King. In this capacity Lord Beric becomes himself a ghostly incarnation of the past. It may be arguably said that it is the ferocity of his commitment to a lost cause of a long dead ruler that stands as the force behind his repetitive resurrections, regardless of the fact that they are credited to the spiritual powers of Thoros of Myr – the guerrilla company's own Friar Tuck. It might indeed appear that Lord Beric Dondarrion will find his closest counterpart in the person of Coldhands, and also in the figure of Lord Brynden the Greenspear himself. This is so because both Benjen Stark and Beric Dondarrion essentially represent the sheer force of righteous moral conviction, which makes them continue in their stubborn commitment to the imposition of order and execution of their duties beyond the spell of their natural life, a feature they share with Lord Brynden. All the three characters effectively embody both the strength of the moral conviction which once underpinned the world of human civilisation before its descent into the chaos and ethical decay brought by the prolonged military conflict. All three of them become cast out from the human world and bound to the forest environment, never being able to venture beyond their new

habitat. Finally, all three of them, by prolonging their existence well beyond the natural lifespan or physical possibilities, entered into a new mode of existence which has preserved just enough of their physical and mental powers to allow them to fulfil the functions they have remained committed to throughout and beyond their natural lives. In this way all three of them become part of the forest ecosystem by losing their individual identity in the service of a communal cause, providing the most tangible instances of, and justifications for, the persistent association of the soldiers with the trees continuously standing guard.

Yet in Lord Beric we also see a vivid example of a decomposition of individual identity which seems to reflect the destruction of, and constant intrusions into, the natural ecosystems of the forest he is destined to hide in. This is because, unlike Coldhands or Lord Brynden, Dondarrion finds no support in an autonomous, healthy forest ecosystem behind him:

“Can I dwell on what I scarce remember? I held a castle on the Marches once, and there was a woman I was pledged to marry, but I could not find that castle today, nor tell you the color of that woman’s hair. Who knighted me, old friend? What were my favorite foods? It all fades. Sometimes I think I was born on the bloody grass in that grove of ash, with the taste of fire in my mouth and a hole in my chest. Are you my mother, Thoros?”

A Storm of Swords, II, 369.

In that sense Dondarrion is also an incarnation and articulation of that ecosystem’s sullen resentment at its integrity being compromised, and in this sense Lord Beric truly is the king of “the realm of rocks, and trees, and rivers”, being an embodiment also of the ecosystem’s grudge against the devastations of war. Consequently, the strange and tragic figure of Beric Dondarrion is a unique example of an unnatural symbiosis, whereby the wounded forest ecosystem sustains a shadow of man who has come to embody the natural values of his own environment, and has been cast out of it when the environment tilted outside the ethical and social norms that once determined its nature.

In yet another sense, Lord Beric is the forest’s own interpretation of the human moral ethos, being the crowing creation of the Riverland

forests' fractured layer of the marvellous through whose obstinate, hopeless quest the bewildered ecosystem seeks to reassert its integrity.

All this brings us to the consideration of another character who enters the Riverland forests of Westeros in pursuit of a desperate quest. Indeed, nowhere throughout *A Song of Ice and Fire* is the theme of the progressive interpenetration of two distinct habitats brought to a common mystery by the fortunes of war more expressive than in the story of Lady Brienne of Tarth.⁴⁷ In the story of Brienne we find a variant of the quest narrative patterns which ultimately derives from the medieval romance tradition, and will have obvious later parallels in the work of Spenser or Cervantes, but it is the unique juxtaposition of the constituent elements that makes the unlikely errant knight such a haunting creation.

With respect to the character of her quest Brienne finds her counterpart in Lord Beric Dondarrion, but the differences are equally significant. Whereas we first encounter Lord Beric as the perfect embodiment of the chivalric ethos and lifestyle of the aristocratic feudal society, the life of Brienne of Tarth is marked by the constant stigma of being perceived as a grotesque aberration from the traditional social norms and gender roles which underlie the ethos's continued validity and appeal. Thus Brienne's fate is determined from the very beginning by her inability to conform to the expectations of her immediate social environment. If we choose to perceive this fact as introducing the narrative pattern of gravitating towards the forest environment in the wake of a failure to fulfil a social obligation, we shall find it recurring again in Brienne's failure to save her beloved king, Renly Baratheon, from a treacherous death and then in her failure to bring Sansa and Arya back to Lady Catelyn Stark in fulfilment of the deal made with Ser Jaime Lannister. Arguably none of those failures should be blamed on Brienne's wilful misconduct, yet they bestow an aura of constant defeat and disappointment upon the character and designates her as the eternal outsider.

⁴⁷ The character of Brienne has already received a great deal of scholarly attention. For a further discussion of the figure in the context of the models of chivalry see Jamison 2018: 106-107, for the gender context see Carroll 2018: 70- 74, for the social context see Larrington 2016: 32-34, Spector 2012: 178-181.

It is in this context that Brienne begins to resemble Lord Berric for, in both cases, it is the consciousness of failure that propels the respective characters into a life of stubborn, if not obsessive, determination to pursue a desperate and practically impossible quest. Being thus charged by Ser Jaime to continue in her vow to bring the one presumably surviving daughter of Lady Catelyn back to her mother, Brienne traverses the war-torn Riverlands and Stormlands in order to find a clue to the whereabouts of Sansa Stark, who had been nimbly smuggled out of King's Landing in the chaos following King Jeffrey's assassination and has not been heard of or seen since then. As this amounts to a search area in excess of a thousand square miles, the whole concept of the quest makes Brienne stand next to Lord Dondarrion as an example of a character whose desperate resolve to stick by the chivalric ideals nominally embraced by the community they live in causes them to be cast outside the community's normal circuit of acceptable behaviour.

It is then of the utmost significance that we are introduced into the post-apocalyptic world of the war-ridden central Westeros through Brienne's focalising perception, for it is against the context of her desperate idealism that we descend upon a world where the natural boundaries between different environments have crumbled in the wake of the armed conflict which engulfed the continent. Since, on the outside, Brienne herself is perceived as a corresponding monstrosity of mismatched identities, the world she traverses opens for her in all its brutal honesty and helplessness:

She asked all of them if they had seen a highborn girl of three-and-ten years with blue eyes and auburn hair. None had. She asked about the road ahead as well. "Twixt here and Duskendale is safe enough," one man told her, "but past Duskendale there's outlaws, and broken men in the woods." Only the soldier pines and sentinels still showed green; the broadleaf trees had donned mantles of russet and gold, or else uncloaked themselves to scratch against the sky with branches brown and bare. Every gust of wind drove swirling clouds of dead leaves across the rutted road.

A Feast for Crows, 46.

As we begin to read the passage through the context of the cross-referential system of semantic echoes employed in the narrative,

the full significance of the employed vocabulary will stand out with admirable clarity. The kenning-styled formula of “sentinels and soldier pine” returns here, together with the recurring reference to the “dead leaves”, to underscore the weight of the anthropomorphism of the vocabulary used in the description of the trees changing their colour with the coming of autumn. In this context the reference to the “broken men in the woods” completes the aura of the natural world and the world of human civilisation interpenetrating each other and losing their respective original distinctive, unique characters. As we further accompany Brienne on her quest through the Riverlands we find that impression forced upon us with ever greater persistence:

East of Maidenpool the hills rose wild, and the pines closed in about them like a host of silent grey-green soldiers.

A Feast for Crows, 222.

As we may see, the formulaic link between the trees and the soldiers is here once more exploited to create the impression that travelling through expanses of the natural world one does not truly leave the visions of human world behind, just like looking at anything in the human world one cannot shake off the association of people and things around with images from the natural world. The obliteration of the traditional boundaries between what have once been distinct realms becomes here the central strain in projecting the post-apocalyptic character of the world Brienne encounters on her quest. As Lady Brienne continues her heroic quest we encounter more elements in the imagery which invoke, through clear symbolic connotations, the idea of the distinctions between the natural and the human world becoming progressively blurred:

The Seven Swords was the largest inn in town, a fourstorey structure that towered over its neighbors, and the double doors on the house across the way were painted gorgeously. They showed a castle in an autumn wood, the trees done up in shades of gold and russet. Ivy crawled up the trunks of ancient oaks, and even the acorns had been done with loving care. When Brienne peered more closely, she saw creatures in the foliage: a sly red fox, two sparrows on a branch, and behind those leaves the shadow of a boar.

A Feast for Crows, 104.

As the painting decorates the entrance into the social centre of the local community and the customary place of social interaction, its symbolic nature cannot be overlooked, and it is even implicitly indicated in the comment of the inn-keeper informing Brienne's that it portrays "all castles". In fact there is little realism in the painting anyway, as castles are not normally located within forests, nor is it a standard custom for woodland creatures of the sort portrayed in the painting to be spotted that close to a human habitat, so what the painting in fact contains is a symbolic vision of the present relation of the human domains being swallowed back into the realm of Nature. It is also important to notice that, following Brienne's internal focalisation as the door opens on the inside of the inn, the observer in the passage will clearly have the sensation of direct association of the people inside with the animals painted on the door.

As Brienne listens to an account about the atrocities committed against those in service of the Faith of the Seven delivered by Septon Meribald, an itinerant preacher she travels with on the stretch between the towns of Maidenpool and Saltpan, the man himself becomes mentally transformed into a tree:

The septon had a lean sharp face and a short beard, grizzled grey and brown. His thin hair was pulled back and knotted behind his head, and his feet were bare and black, gnarled and hard as tree roots.

A Feast for Crows, 51.

Thus, as the barbarism of war deprives the spiritual institutions of all vestiges of respect and reverence, the sustained resilience with which Meribald goes about performing the duties incumbent on his vocation has placed him beyond the current norms of his native environment and makes him more a part of the ruthless, but more enduring natural world. In this sense Septon Meribald is a symbol of the residual core of human spirituality being given refuge in the harsh reality of existence, extending beyond the tyranny of pride and ambition which has rendered the human habitat deprived of an ethical core. It will finally be Septon Meribald who will provide the most sustained and detailed account of the mechanism behind the interpenetration of the world of the forest and that of the human community:

“If they want new boots or a warmer cloak or maybe a rusted iron halfhelm, they need to take them from a corpse, and before long they are stealing from the living too, from the smallfolk whose lands they’re fighting in, men very like the men they used to be. They slaughter their sheep and steal their chickens, and from there it’s just a short step to carrying off their daughters too. And one day they look around and realize all their friends and kin are gone, that they are fighting beside strangers beneath a banner that they hardly recognize. They don’t know where they are or how to get back home and the lord they’re fighting for does not know their names, yet here he comes, shouting for them to form up, to make a line with their spears and scythes and sharpened hoes, to stand their ground. And the knights come down on them, faceless men clad all in steel, and the iron thunder of their charge seems to fill the world...”

And the man breaks.

“He turns and runs, or crawls off afterward over the corpses of the slain, or steals away in the black of night, and he finds someplace to hide. All thought of home is gone by then, and kings and lords and gods mean less to him than a haunch of spoiled meat that will let him live another day, or a skin of bad wine that might drown his fear for a few hours. The broken man lives from day to day, from meal to meal, more beast than man. Lady Brienne is not wrong. In times like these, the traveler must beware of broken men, and fear them... but he should pity them as well.”

A Feast for Crows, 297.

The process which Meribald describes is essentially that of people living within the civilised communities becoming outlaws in the wake of the deprivations and lawlessness of wartime. Yet the collective story he unveils is not like that of the northern wildlings, who find freedom from the confines of the feudal world south of the Wall by entering into the role of the junior partner in a parasitic relation with a powerful, integral habitat. Rather, what the septon talks about is a process whereby the people who enter the forest ecosystem after losing a foothold in the human world gradually lose their mental integrity, in the wake of living in an environment which they can never be a part of in any sustained relation because it itself crumbles under the burden of the forced intrusion. Importantly here, the breakout in the hierarchical social order under which the human communities traditionally functioned open no perspective of freedom, but dooms those expelled from its protective shadow to live a life of gradual

mental and physical degradation. The described process is somewhat akin to what has happened to Lord Berric, but the difference is that, without the exceptional strength of moral conviction which, in his nobility, Lord Dondarrion has managed to preserve, no human being can truly integrate with the natural ecosystem like the forest, because like the tree, he remains irrevocably bound to the natural organic order of his native habitat. Therefore, in Martin's world, an outlaw is never more than an invader into the natural environment of the forest who is only capable of making his own misery contagious to his surroundings. Thus the forests of the Riverlands are never really places where refuge from hunger and genocide may be found. Rather, in the futile attempts to escape the horrors in which the human civilisation of Westeros has been submerged, its inhabitants succeed in extending the helplessness of their current existence in the neighbouring environments of the forests.

As we consequently proceed with Brienne in her search for Sansa, the images exploiting and the association between the trees and the human beings reoccur constantly and they are now given a perceptibly new context of intimate, almost endearing tragedy:

They came upon the first corpse a mile from the crossroads. He swung beneath the limb of a dead tree whose blackened trunk still bore the scars of the lightning that had killed it. The carrion crows had been at work on his face, and wolves had feasted on his lower legs where they dangled near the ground. Only bones and rags remained below his knees... along with one well-chewed shoe, half-covered by mud and mold.

A Feast for Crows, 430.

The strongly symbolic aura of the passage is of, course, difficult to overlook. The parallelism in the association between the physical state of the dead soldier and the condition of the dead tree from which he has been hanged is here strengthened by the evidently symbolic crossroads where the execution has taken place. The symbolic sense of the crossroads will be especially poignant in the context of what Septon Meribald had to say about the fate of those attempting to live outside their native habitat. In this context the crossroads is a place outside any possible habitat – a place of being helplessly exposed in all individual weakness against the malice of one's enemies. Thus at the

juncture of two organically different environments the only mode of coexistence, or symbiosis, may be found in the brotherhood of death.

Nowhere is the interpenetration of the natural and the human world presented with more vividness than in the account of what Brienne and her squire Podrick Payne will find next on their journey:

After that, hardly a hundred yards went by without a corpse. They dangled under ash and alder, beech and birch, larch and elm, hoary old willows and stately chestnut trees. Each man wore a noose around his neck, and swung from a length of hempen rope, and each man's mouth was packed with salt. Some wore cloaks of grey or blue or crimson, though rain and sun had faded them so badly that it was hard to tell one color from another. Others had badges sewn on their breasts. Brienne spied axes, arrows, several salmon, a pine tree, an oak leaf, beetles, bantams, a boar's head, half a dozen tridents. Broken men, she realized, dregs from a dozen armies, the leavings of the lords.

A Feast for Crows, 430.

The whole concept of the passage rests on the close, individual association between the corpses of the dead soldiers and the particular species of trees with which they have been united through the mode of their execution. As we observe the colours of the different liveries by which the soldiers' feudal loyalties would have once been identified become faded through contact with the elements, the whole symbolism of the soldiers' social identities being eroded and grown indistinct by contact with the world of Nature emerges forcefully from the passage. After losing their civilised identities, the dead soldiers here acquire new ones which come from the kinds of trees they died on and, as if in final mockery, also from the species of animals and other natural symbols incorporated into the sigils and heraldic emblems, as symbols of those features and qualities of the natural world which the human civilisation sought to appropriate. In this way the passage marks the limit to which the interpenetration of the natural and human world has gone in the secondary world of Martin's narrative. The inherent incompatibility of the two mutually exclusive environments is projected here in a convincing and irrevocable manner, as is their potential for inflicting damage on their counterpart.

Yet it has also to be remembered here that it is the ruined, war-torn state of the two worlds that compromises their respective identities and brings them on a collision course with each other. Unlike in Tolkien, in Martin's vision for his secondary world, the narrowing of the distance between the world of the human society and the world of Nature marks no return to a state of hierarchical balance which reflects the original blueprint for the operations of the created universe, but rather constitutes an example of violence done to two autonomous environments which fare best at a respectful distance from each other because the principles behind their respective character and operations are to a substantial degree incompatible.

As we witness Brienne being sentenced by the undead incarnation of her last feudal liege, Catelyn Stark, for allegedly betraying her loyalty and the vow which set her on the irretrievably tragic quest, we see the last character who embodies the ethos of chivalry in its most pristinely idealist form become lost in the blindly ruthless justice of the forest ecosystem:

Beneath a crooked willow, the outlaws slipped a noose about her neck, jerked it tight, and tossed the other end of the rope over a limb. Hyle Hunt and Podrick Payne were given elms.

A Feast for Crows, 503.

It seems that, as Catelyn Stark takes over from Lord Berric as the resident wight incarnation of the Riverland forests, her rationale and outlook leans more towards reflecting the instinctive vengefulness of a wounded natural ecosystem rather than an allegiance to any chivalric or moral ethos of the human world. Consequently, Brienne's execution resembles more a marriage ceremony where each of the sentenced is made to embrace a tree in a gruesome ritual which takes each of them beyond the circuit of humanity. Thus, as far as the human symbolism reaches into the scene, it will help us discern the echo of the traditional association of the willow tree with exile, loss of the native habitat and bereavement. The symbolic connection, originating from the famous vision of the Babylonian captivity from Psalm 137, would appear to strengthen this aspect of the situation. Yet the willow has also been, in cultures as apparently distant as the Celtic

and the Chinese, a symbol of renewal and resilient vitality, which seems to create a contrast between Brienne and her companions, as their lot is to be hanged on the elm tree which was traditionally associated with death (being the kind of tree used for the production of coffins – as Geoffrey Chaucer puts it in *The Parliament of Fowls*: “The piler elm, the cofre unto careyne” (l.177).

As if in ultimate mockery of the chivalric ethos which once underpinned the feudal civilisation of Westeros, Brienne is apparently resurrected in undead form to emerge from the forest as a bait to lure Jaime Lannister into the hands of the Brotherhood, which may be well taken as the final act in the story of the gradual poisoning of each of the two worlds by the other.

In recapitulation of all of the above argument concerning George R. R. Martin’s conception of the role of the forest in his secondary world, we may say that, while Martin’s indebtedness to the medieval conceptual legacy is directly perceptible in *A Song of Ice and Fire*, the use of the tradition differs significantly from what we have seen in Tolkien. In Tolkien’s secondary world the role of the forest, and more widely that of the world of Nature, is, first of all, bound to the notion of the hierarchical arrangement of all the constituent sections of Creation, which ultimately harks back to the idea of the Chain of Being. This in itself is the direct result of the prominence of the spiritual dimension in Tolkien’s concept for the secondary world as a whole, and the universality of its ontological character. Being an indispensable constituent part of the unified, complete secondary Creation, the natural world constitutes an environment within which the nominally higher rational civilisations may realise their potential, into which the idea of stewardship is incorporated as one of the most vital elements. This kind of relationship is the result of the spiritual unity of Creation as a whole, and it allows the rational civilisations to relate to the spiritual absolute in the way that was envisaged for them in the original eschatological scheme, because the stewardship is not only a duty incumbent on those sections of Creation which remain by their nature in more direct contact with the spiritual, but is in itself a sign of recognising one’s nominally superior position in Creation as a divine gift. The stewardship of Nature is, first and foremostly, a token of acknowledgement, gratitude and humility.

Consequently, Tolkien's forest environments emerge into the fulfilment of their potential only when they develop their marvellous layer (which constitutes their interpretation of the spiritual) in a hierarchical relationship with an ethically sound rational civilisation. Thus, in the case of Tolkien, it is the idea of the stewardship of Nature that is the prime engine behind the transformation of the medieval legacy into the original conception for his secondary world.

Conversely, in the secondary world developed in *A Song of Ice and Fire*, the absence of a universal spiritual dimension has the result of locating the world of Nature in a more autonomous, independent position. In Martin, natural environments like the forests are capable, if left undisturbed, of developing their own independent link with the spiritual. This is because the spiritual dimension remains, in Martin's universe, ultimately bound with the physical locality and is not vindicated within a universal eschatological scheme. Consequently, the marvellous layer which the forests possess in Martin originates from symbiotic relations within the forest ecosystems and with those rational communities which are willing to enter into a relation of partnership.

Thus instead of relationships forming a hierarchical unity, Martin sees the natural relationship between the realm of the rational civilisation and the forest as a respectful cohabitation, within which the forest is potentially the senior partner – because the rational civilisation does not have any different, independent access to the spiritual other than through the forest's marvellous reality, although it may be indispensable to its optimal functioning. In other words, the human civilisation is here inherently incapable of providing spiritual leadership to the world of Nature.

Because of all these differences, in George R. R. Martin's narrative there is more recourse to those medieval literary motifs which concern the transformation of the protagonists' identity in the wake of contract with the potency of forests' marvellous reality, while, for Tolkien, the forests are, first and foremostly, places of trial and temptation. This is because the inherent vulnerability of those natural environments whose customary link with a rational civilisation has for some reason been severed makes them easy prey for the forces of evil. Consequently, they become places characterised by more than

average concentration of evil influences which erode their marvellous layer and make them inevitable battle grounds where ethical challenges must be answered.

At the same time, the forests of Tolkien's secondary world are frequently places of solace and refuge where characters may undergo a process of physical and spiritual rejuvenation, as they become exposed to the closer presence of the sacred which penetrates through the veil of the marvellous. This hierophantic quality of the forest is derivative of fact that it is through the union of the various levels of Creation that the completeness of the eschatological design is manifested in Tolkien's fiction.

Thus, overall, differences in the approaches taken by the two respective authors towards the medieval literary heritage creates a situation when narrative motifs traceable to the very same sources and tradition will ultimately fulfil a markedly different function in the course of their narratives.

Chapter III

Sound and Silence – The Legacy of Medieval Aural Perception

I. The Medieval Model of Aural Perception

In order to embark on the complex and subtle subject of perception of sound during the High Middle Ages with due sensitivity, we must first note the arguably most eloquent literary elaboration on the subject during the period, found in the memorable passages of the second book of Geoffrey Chaucer's *House of Fame*. As the incredulous narrator is carried in the talons of the monstrous Eagle during his airborne journey to the fabled abode of the Goddess Fame, he is treated to an extensive tutorial in the rudiments of contemporaneous scholarship concerning the nature of sound perception:

Soun ys noight but eyr ybroken;
And every speche that ys spoken,
Lowd or pryvee, foul or fair,
In his substaunce ys but air;
For as flaumbe ys but lyghted smoke,
Ryght soo soun ys air ybroke.

The House of Fame, II, 765-770

While on the face of it this sort of argument does not appear to differ in any significant way from a description of the creation of sound presented by modern day science, it will become clear that it also points to some significant discrepancies.

The first crucial difference is due to the fact that, for Chaucer, the word “air” means something completely different. Whereas contemporary science describes air as a composition of various gases constituting a layer surrounding the Earth’s surface, held in place by the planet’s gravitational pull, for the Eagle air is one of the four elements, i.e. an indivisible primary substance kept in its position by an inherent native force instilled in it by the order of Divine Providence:

Geffrey, thou wost ryght wel this,
 That every kyndely thyng that is
 Hath a kyndely stede ther he
 May best in hyt conserved be;
 Unto which place every thyng
 Thorgh his kyndely enclynyng
 Moveth for to come to
 Whan that hyt is away therfro;
 [...]
 Thus every thing, by thys reson,
 Hath his propre mansyon
 To which hit seketh to repaire,
 Ther-as hit shulde not repaire.

The House of Fame, II. 729-746

In the course of the following argument, the Eagle somewhat inevitably notes that his explanation is borne from the scholarship of appropriate authorities; the bird’s argument could easily be supported by a relevant passage from a classic scholastic work which formed the basis of established opinion at the time. If we look, for instance, at St. Thomas Aquinas’ *De Principiis Naturae* it is clear how the weight of the classical heritage remains visible behind the contemporaneous understanding of the principles upon which the natural world is founded:

Elementum vero non dicitur proprie nisi de causis ex quibus est compositio rei, quae proprie sunt materiales. Et iterum non de qualibet causa materiali, sed de illa ex qua est prima compositio: sicut nec membra elementa sunt hominis, quia membra etiam sunt composita ex aliis; sed dicimus quod terra et aqua sunt elementa, quia haec non componuntur ex aliis

corporibus, sed ex ipsis est prima compositio corporum naturalium. Unde Aristoteles in quinto *Metaph.* dicit quod elementum est id ex quo componitur res primo, et est in ea, et non dividitur secundum formam.

St. Thomas Aquinas *De Principiis Naturea*, Caput 3.

[Element, on the other hand, is applied properly only to the causes of which the thing is composed, which are properly the materials. Moreover, it is not said of just any material cause, but of that one of which a thing is primarily composed; for example, we do not say that the members of the body are the elements of man, because the members also are composed of other things. Rather, we say that earth and water are the elements, because these are not composed of other bodies, but natural bodies are primarily composed of them. Hence Aristotle says, in the fifth book of the *Metaphysics*, that an element is that of which a thing is primarily composed, which is in that thing, and which is not divided by a form.]

Consequently, the way sound waves are transmitted through air is compared by the learned fowl to ripples spreading on the water's surface:

Now hennesforth y wol the teche
 How every speche, or noyse, or soun,
 Thurgh hys multiplicacioun,
 Thogh hyt were piped of a mous,
 Mot nede come to Fames Hous.
 I preve hyt thus -- take hede now --
 Be experience; for yf that thow
 Throwe on water now a stoon,
 Wel wost thou hyt wol make anoon
 A litel roundell as a sercle,
 Paraunter brod as a covercle;
 And ryght anoon thow shalt see wel
 That whel wol cause another whel,
 And that the thridde, and so forth, brother,
 Every sercle causynge other
 Wydder than hymselfe was;
 ...
 Ryght so of ayr, my leve brother:
 Everych ayr another stereth
 More and more, and speche up bereth,

Or voys, or noyse, or word, or soun,
Ay through multiplicacioun,

The House of Fame, II. 782-820

In fact, the same comparison is used by Aquinas in the 16th chapter of the Second Book of his commentary on Aristotle's *De Anima*, which contains St. Thomas' elucidation of the nature of the aural experience as discussed by the Philosopher. Although Aquinas acknowledges the propensity of sound waves to be able to expand in all directions ("sonantium aer in girum movetur, et sonus undique diffunditur" in *Commentary on Aristotle's De Anima*, Liber II, Lectio 16, n 10.), living in an age which disregarded perspective means the underlying metaphor remains in its essence two-dimensional.

The key word in this context is "multiplicacioun", since it presupposes an increase in numbers. As such, within modern understanding, an image of sound waves conveys a gradual transmission of vibrating particles, while in medieval perception the mental picture is one of sound gradually expanding into a circular presence.

What lies behind the whole philosophy is the contemporaneous perception of space. Medieval perception of space was based on two underlying concepts: *locus* and *spatium*. *Spatium* denotes an expanse, or else a breadth the boundaries of which can be defined from a certain point of reference called the *locus*. For the medieval mind space is thus always finite and filled by some matter, or some rearrangement of visual reality which has created the space one is looking at by its presence (Zumthor 1983: 1-47; 51-55). Thus the notion of *empty space* is not actually conceivable in medieval visual perception since space is not treated as an abstract concept, or a pre-conceived receptacle made ready to be furnished with actual objects, as it would be now. Hence the organising principle by which objects occupying neighbouring space relate to each other is not a relationship as part of an unbroken linear sequence, but rather one based on concentricity, whereby individual objects create the space they come to occupy by growing out of a concentric point of reference – again the *locus*. Thus space is not an unbroken sequence, but is itself created by objects being adjacent to one another. Consequently, in Middle English usage, the word "space" refers to a dimension of time

rather than any visual context (Lewis: 1998: 7). The whole concept stands in manifest opposition to the modern cognitive model of *coexistent space* (Martin 1977: 154), where objects may share interrelated positions and be conceptually intertwined within three-dimensional space creating a cognitive impression of recessional depth which “links images across an intervening space” (Martin: 1977: 164). In contrast, the medieval consciousness perceives space as a hierarchy of concentric units expanding from a central point (Gurewicz 1973: 37). Thus, in his interpretation of Aristotle, Aquinas considers any sound to expand concentrically from a *locus* point on a two-dimensional plane created by the expansion of the sound waves through the element of air:

[...] quod sonus fiat in actu, oportet tria concurrere: fit enim semper aliquis, as aliquid, et in aliquo; [...].

Ictus autem percutientis non fit sine motu locali; motus autem localis non fit sine medio.

St. Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on Aristotle's De Anima*, Liber II, Lectio 16, no. 4

[there are three concurrent factors in sound: Sound is of something, on something, in something. [...] What produces sound must touch something as with a sudden blow. Now a blow implies local movement, which implies a medium. Hence the need for a medium, if sound is to be produced actually.]

Consequently, because the element of air is matter devoid of form, as both Aristotle and Aquinas would remind us, it is the appearance of sound which bestows a transitory form upon the primary element, which otherwise is effectively a formless *vacuum* and needs the sonic impulse to activate its ontological potential. As Aquinas explains:

Dicit ergo primo, quod quia medium in sono est aer, recte dicitur a quibusdam, quod vacuum est proprium sensui auditus, quia videtur eis quod vacuum sit aer. Aer autem facit audire sonum, cum moveatur, existens unus et continuus, ut in eo possit formari sonus. Et quia ad hoc quod formetur sonus, necessaria est unitas et continuitas aeris,

(...)

Sic igitur patet, quod illud est sonans tantum, id est faciens sonum, quod movet aerem unum continuum existentem a se usque ad auditum. Sic ergo patet, quod illi qui dicunt quod vacuum est proprium sensui auditus, dicunt aliquid recte: quia esse proprium auditus competit aeri, quem vacuum esse dicunt. Non autem dicunt recte quantum ad hoc quod plenum aere dicunt esse vacuum.

St. Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on Aristotle's De Anima*, Liber II, Lectio 17, n 1-2.

[First, then, he observes that, the medium of sound being air, it has been rightly said that the vacuum was an essential factor in hearing (for those who said this thought that 'the vacuum' was air). Now when air is disturbed it makes sound audible, provided that it is a single continuum such that a sound can be formed in it. For if sound is to be produced it requires a singleness and continuity in the air;

It is clear then that nothing sounds, i.e. produces sound, unless it sets in motion a single continuum of air between itself and the hearing. It follows that those who said that the 'vacuum' was adapted to the sense of hearing said something to the point; for to be adapted to hearing is a property of air, which they called a vacuum. But they were not right in using the term 'vacuum' for that which is really full of air.]

Since this is the basis of medieval space perception, the absence of perspective in medieval visual representations of reality is not surprising since the notion does not appear to accurately account for the nature of contemporaneous visual experience; this is because perspective presupposes a progressive linear continuity of space and a unified point of reference for all the objects included in the visual representation.

This is relevant to our discussion of the medieval aural experience because we can state that the medieval perception of sound operated on a corresponding set of characteristics. As we see from the Eagle's learned explications, according to medieval sensibilities sound creates an aural space around itself by progressively expanding the circumference and, consequently, coming into contact with more objects and entities on its way. In other words, sound is not as much transmitted as created in air, as the continuous aural sensation creates acoustic space by reacting to being activated by the expanding circle of sound.

Let us now consider the aural experience in more depth. During his lengthy lecture, the Eagle uses a number of words to denote various kinds of aural stimuli – we hear of “voys, or noyse, or word, or soun”. Let us now try to categorise these.¹ The first thing that stands out is the prominence of the human voice as the primary sound. To a large extent, this is a somewhat predictable reflection of the fact that we are talking about aural experience in a world devoid of any sort of industrial or mechanically repetitive sounds. Since the majority of sound is generated by “organic” sources, the primary normative criterion for the conceptual arrangement of various sounds is less the volume or specificity of features such as tone or pitch, and more the comprehensibility and discernible, inherent harmony. Consequently, Aquinas in his commentary on Aristotle’s acoustic theory discusses the human voice in a separate chapter.

This is duly reflected in actual verbal usage; interestingly, the most commonly used word in relation to aural experience is not “soun” but “noyse”. Today, “noyse” most frequently denotes any continuous loud sound which either does not contain a rationally comprehensible component or its potential existence is less relevant to the listener than is emphatic expansive formation of an acoustic space. The resulting pejorative connotations of the word are clear, and unsurprisingly, according to the *Middle English Dictionary*, 158 of the 191 recorded cases of the use of the word convey a negative meaning and only 33 evoke a positive connotation. Since “noyse” is a relatively common word, its potentially loose semantic field is reinforced by the addition of strongly pejorative adjectives to amplify the negative connotations which are frequently contextual. Thus the *Middle English Dictionary* defines “noyse” as a “loud and unpleasant sound”.

However, most commonly “noyse” is generated by crowds and gatherings of people; we see how this functions in a sample passage from *The Knight’s Tale*:

¹ Examples illustrating this argument have been generated using the Corpus of Middle English Prose and Verse <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/c/cme/> and Middle English Compendium (see Bibliography) <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary>.

And on the morwe whan þat day gan spryng
 Of hors and harneys noyse and claterynge
 The grete Theseus that of his sleepe awaked
 With Mynstralcie and noyse þat was maked
 Heeld yet the chambre of his Paleys riche
 Til that the Thebane knyghtes bothe yliche
 Honored were in to the paleys fet
 [...]

An heraud on a Scaffold made an Oo
 Til al the noyse of peple was ydo
 And whan he saugh the noyse of peple al stille
 Tho shewed he the myghty dukes wille

G. Chaucer *The Knight's Tale*, 2532

Otherwise “noyse” may be caused by animals:

What seye we of hem that bileeuen in diuynails, as by flight or by noyse of
 briddes, or of beestes, or by sort by nigromancie, by dremes. by chirkyng
 of dores, or crakyng of houses, by gnawynge of rattes, and swich manere
 wrecchednesse ?

G. Chaucer *The Parson's Tale*, 600-605

Penne þise cacheres þat coupe cowpled hor houndez,
 Vnclosed þe kenel dore and calde hem þeroute,
 Blwe bygly in buglez þre bare mote;
 Braches bayed þerfore and breme noyse maked;

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, III. 1139-1142

[...] þay founden hym sone,
 And quen þay seghe hym with syȝt þay sued hym fast,
 Wreȝande hym ful weterly with a wroth noyse;

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, 1704-1706

I herde a noyse..That ferde as been don in an hive.

G. Chaucer *The House of Fame*, 1521

Drow euyn to the dragon, dressit hym to fight,
 And he gird him agayne with a grym noyse:
 Mony slecynges vnslogh throughe hys slote yode.

As þe welkyn shold walt, a wonderfull noyse
 Skremyt vp to the skrow with a skryke ffelle.
Gest Historiale, 908-911

or by natural phenomena:

And for ye neither shullen, dar I seye,
 Heren noyse of reynes nor of thonder?
 G. Chaucer *Troilus and Cryseide*, III

The water, in rennyng, Gan make a noyse ful lykyng.
 Chaucer's *Romance of the Rose*, 1416

In general, it can be said that the semantic range of “noyse” covers instances of loud and insistent sound in which there is no inherent rationally organised quality, or at least this aspect does not elicit the primary attention of the listener. This semantic quality means it is mainly used mostly in negative contexts – “noyse” is usually the kind of sound that expands its space in an insistent and obtrusive way. In consequence, “noyse” is frequently used instead of other nouns referring to the aural experience in order to underline the difference between articulate and inarticulate expression:

The angry and wrathful man maketh noyses, and the pacient man attempreth hym and stilleth.

G. Chaucer *Tale of Melibee*, 1514

He that entremetteth hym of the noyse or striff of another man is lyk to hym that taketh an hound by the erys.

G. Chaucer *Tale of Melibee*, 1540

Sometimes “noyse” denotes the emotional component of an articulate form of expression:

With a sorwful noise he seyde thus, among hise sobbes.

G. Chaucer *Troilus and Cryseide*, IV, 374

Now, interestingly, it is the word “soun” which is chiefly used for the articulate form of expression, which in practice means primarily

human speech. As opposed to “noyse”, the majority of instances where these words appear concern human speech where the rational intent behind the production of sound or an expression of moderate, rationally controlled emotional state is the chief characteristic for the listener:

They..seide to hem in mery soun: ‘Ye bene welcome, by Seynt Symoun!’
Richard Coeur de Lion -b text, 102-105

He sade to hen wyth sobre soun, ‘Wy stonde ȝe ydel þise dayez longe?’
Pearl, 532

Þe soun of oure souerayn þen swey in his ere,
 Þat vpbraydes þis burne vpon a breme wyse.
Patience, 429

the soun of the apostelis wente out into al erthe to teche Godis hestis.
Book to A Mother, 75/15

Another expression which is approximate yet distinct in its semantic range and function is the word “stevene”; it is mainly translated into Modern English as “voice” even though it carries a distinct quality in the original medieval context. The correspondence in the basic meaning, i.e. that denoting an articulate, rational human speech, is most likely the result of the fact that “stevene” functioned as a highly alliterative rank equivalent of the word “voys” in the selection of poetic words used in formulaic phrases which carried the pattern of alliterating stressed syllables, or staves, which create the accentual rhythm in Middle English alliterative verse. However, “stevene” appears to have a wider application: it may be used to refer to animal and natural sounds which are sometimes synonymous with “noyse”, but it also appears when there are no negative connotations; in other words, the space amplified by the sounds it denotes is not obtrusive for the listener:

Among al this to rumbelen gan the hevene;
 The thunder rored with a grisely stevene.
 G. Chaucer *The Legend of Good Women*, 1218-1219

Never steven hem astel, so stoken is hor tonge;

(*Cleanness*, 1542)

At a stylle stollen steven, unstered wyth syzt,

(*Cleanness*, 706)

Steryng steuyn vp strake, strakid þar trumpis.

(*Wars of Alexander*, 1386)

That had affrayed me out of slepe

Through noyse and swetnesse of hir song;

[...]

To telle shortly, at oo worde,

Was never y-herd so swete a steven,

But hit had be a thing of heven;

G. Chaucer *The Book of the Duchess*, 295-30

And thogh him lacke vois and speche,

He gan up with his feet areche,

And wailende in his bestly stevene

He made his pleignte unto the hevene.

J. Gower *Confession Amantis*, I, 3023-3026

Most characteristically, however, “stevene” is used to express the cadenced rationality of the human voice:

Than answered mayden Margarete, as bryghte as onye levyn.

Sche them sadlye answered with fulle mylde stevyn:

The Life of St. Margaret of Antioch, 55-56

The voys of peple touched the heuene,

So loude cride they with mury steuene.

G. Chaucer *The Knight's Tale*, 2561-2562

Whan I here of hir vois the stevene,

Me thenkth it is a blisse of hevene.

J. Gower *Confessio Amantis*, VI. 873

As shown in the last two examples, the positive connotation of “stevene” is enhanced by the fact that it commonly functions in a formulaic pair with “hevene”, both belonging to the same formulaic

rhyme cluster. The most crucial thing about “stevene” is, however, that it is frequently used to specifically denote a sense of a rationally conceived utterance, a meaning abstracted out of a speech act:

The vertu of the ryng, if ye wol heere,
 Is this, that if hire lust it for to were
 Upon his thombe, or in hir purs it bere,
 Ther is no fowel that fleeth under the hevene
 That she ne shal wel understonde his stevene,
 And knowe his menyng openly and pleyn,
 And answeere hym in his langage ageyn;

G. Chaucer *The Squire's Tale*, 146-152

Swich a vois was of hym and a stevene
 Thoroughout the world, of honour and largesse,
 That it up rong unto the yate of hevene.

G. Chaucer *Troilus and Cryseide*, III, 1723-1725

As shown in the last quotation, it is not uncommon to describe the aural experience by collocation of two pertinent nouns. Of course this is a general practice enshrined in the decorum of poetic composition of the day by circumstances deriving from the oral roots and partially oral practice of medieval literary experience. What we have here is a remnant of the art of creating formulaic collocations of words which reaches back to Anglo-Saxon times; more immediately it reflects the customary linguistic redundancy distinctive of verse composed for oral delivery (and, at times, the basic demands of metrical composition itself).²

On the semantic level, the function of such collocations is to emphasise the specific meaning of the constituent parts of the given collocation; for the word “stevene”, the semantic range is fairly wide. In contrast, the word “voys” refers solely to instances when a sense of a rational judgement is expressed in an articulate utterance:

² The following are good examples: “Al þat on half dachste adovnn..of þis temple with gret noyse and soun”, *South English Legendary*, 28/51, or “[The dragon] Com in rampende among hem alle /With such a noise and such a rore,/That thei agast were.” *Confessio Amantis*, VI, 2182-2184.

And ItheCUS that other hihte,
Which hath the vois of every soun,
The chiere and the condicioun
Of every lif, [...]

J. Gower *Confessio Amantis*, IV, 3044-3047

A voys sede as him þoʒte þes wordes þoru se soun, ‘Wel is þe, wel is þe,’
as he vel adoun.

Robert of Gloucester’s Chronicle, 7550

O kyng Priam,’ quod they, “thus sygge we,
That al oure vois is to forgon Criseyde.”

G. Chaucer *Troilus and Cryseyde*, IV, 194-195

or when we talk about an animal sound in relation to its specificity,
not its actual sensory impact upon the listener:

The turtles voys is herd, my dove sweete;
G. Chaucer *The Merchant’s Tale*, 2139,

These briddes syngith with clier voys.
Prose Merlin, 191,

The Owle hatte bubo and haþ þat name of þe soun of hire voys.

144b/b:

A voice is propreliche þe sowne þat comeþ of þe mouþ of a beste.

333b/b

John Trevisa’s translation of Bartholomaeus’ *Anglicus’s De Proprietatibus Rerum*.

Both these meanings denote the significance or quality of the heard sound sequence, although it is taken out of its immediate context in the acoustic space as would happen when we relate a specific instance of hearing something. In other words, the sound described does not seek to impose the space it has created upon the listener even if the listener is aware of the sonic impulse.

Because our present discussion concerns the fundamental psychological cornerstones of the aural perception of the medieval period, we have allowed ourselves to skim over potential differences in

the usage of key verbal concepts presented in the context of specific dialects of Middle English; this is because they would not substantially affect the overall picture, as it concerns deeply ingrained mental habits of the entire medieval civilisation. It may be pertinent, however, to mention that our argument could be expanded by a more detailed discussion of certain words and concepts which were limited in their use to a particular dialect or cultural tradition.

Let us use as an example the word “rurde”. It was a high alliterative rank formulaic equivalent of the word “noyse” from the [r] alliterative cluster, northern dialects of Middle English before disappearing along with the rest of the poetic vocabulary of high alliterative rank, leaving behind its colloquial, low register counterpart:

Swangeande swete þe water con swepe, Wyth a rownande rourde raykande aryȝt.

Pearl, 112

þe rich rurd þat þer watz rayсед for Renaude saule with lote.

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, 1916

A similar example is the word “murmur”, which functioned as a high register synonym of “noyse” within the [m] alliterative formulaic cluster, as used in the *Gest Historiale of the Destruction of Troy*:

The murmur was mykell of þe mayn pepull,
Lest þai dang hir to dethe in hor dull hate.

Gest Historiale, 11903-11904,

The murmur was mykill of his mayn knightes,
With gronyng & gref for þere gret angur,
Ay in doute of the dethe, dredyng hom-seluyñ.

Gest Historiale, 10663-10664

It should be noted that, throughout the *Gest*, the word “noyse” is also used in the low register fourth accent position (“Drow euyñ to the dragon, dressit hym to fight,

And he gird him agayne with a grym noyse”, III, 906-907). As shown in written records, the word “murmur” gained popularity

further south where it functioned as a synonym of “noyse” outside of any formulaic grids:

In that vale, heren men often tyme grete tempestes and thondres & grete murmures and noyses alle dayes and nyghtes.

Mandeville's Travels, 187/8

thei were alle armed, and com rydinge fiercely, and made soche noyse and soche murmur, that a myle of lengthe it myght haue ben herde, [...]

Prose Merlin, 266

Indeed, it even became the name for the allegorical personification of noise in John Gower's famous poem:

Toward this vice of which we trete
Ther ben yit tweie of thilke estrete,
Here name is Murmur and Compleignte:

J. Gower *Confessio Amantis*, I, 1343-1345

Another example is the word “bruit/brewte”, derived, of course, from the French equivalent of “noyse”, (which already functions together with “noyse” as a formulaic collocation in Anglo-Norman):

Ther sholde ye haue herde soche bruyt and soche noyse and cry that it was merveile and grete doell to here.

Prose Merlin, 211

Sir Trystram encheved many grete batayles, wherethorow all the noyse and brewte fell to sir Trystram, and the name ceased of sir Launcelot.

T. Malory, *Le Morte Darthur*, 785/1

Moving on the final crucial expression used to describe the aural experience during the Middle Ages, we need to start by raising an important point: it is extremely rare for words such as “noyse”, “steven” or “soun” to appear in the plural, and they are essentially treated as uncountable nouns. The reason for this is relatively obvious when we consider the underlying principles of medieval space perception discussed above. If the acoustic space is called into existence by each sound (rather than being an ever present mental template used by

the listener to note individual sounds), it becomes clear that there is no way for two distinct sounds to exist simultaneously in any single aural experience. For that to happen, we would have to be able to imagine a canvas of empty acoustic space within which the sound would be located, and we have already noted that was psychologically impossible in medieval aural perception. Therefore, if we see a plural form, as in the already quoted excerpt from Chaucer [“The angry and wrathful man maketh noises...”], the plural refers to numerous instances of the sound being produced or it occurring over a prolonged period of time.

Hence, a typical description of sound does not relate it to its specific source or location; similarly, it does not connect it to any specific points of orientation:

Anon ther is a noyse of peple bigonne
for loye of this so loude and heighe with alle
It semed that the lystes sholde falle

G. Chaucer *The Knight's Tale*, 2660-2662

They reden bothe day and nyght.
When they come to Gormoyse,
There they harde moche noyse.
They enturde in sone in haste,
For they were nothyng agaste.

Guy of Warwick, 4808-4812

Vnto his in he gan to gon.
Noyse & cri he herd in þat cite,
He gan oxy what it miȝt be;
He hem oxed what it were
& what was al þat noise þere.

Guy of Warwick, 2545-2550

Moreover, when two different sounds are made to coexist in a scene, they are described consecutively with no reciprocal, “spatial” relation between them being indicated:

Ac fram his men he dassed sone
Bi a wode oway alone

Makeand ful sikerly
 Swiþe michel diol & cri.
 Swiche noyse ros in þe bataile
 Pat þei it hadde þondred saun faille
 No schuld men it yhere.

Arthur and Merlin, 9315-9321

Thus medieval mental habits do not usually invoke the experience of approaching a source of sound in a gradual way, since this would require a sense of aural perspective including an empty acoustic space which would be gradually filled with sound. At the time, individuals lacked the mental inclination to conceive of experiencing sound in this way; consequently any loud sound is already introduced at the highest intensity:

With heȝe helme on his hede, his launce in his honde,
 He romez vp to þe roffe of þe roȝ wonez.
 Þene herde he of þat hyȝe hil, in a harde roche
 Biȝonde þe broke, in a bonk, a wonder breme noyse,
 Quat! hit clatered in þe clyff, as hit cleue schulde,
 As one vpon a gryndelston hade grounden a syþe.

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, l. 2190

[they] toke her wey towarde Arondell, and were with-oute moo of the beste horsed, ffor thei wolde not disgarnyssh the londe of peple, and so thei ride on euenynges and on morownynges, and by the moste vncowth weyes that thei knewe, till thei com half a myle from Arondell, and than thei herde grete bruyt and grete noyse, [...]

Prose Merlin, 291.

Most commonly, we have a situation where one sound has to stop before another can become the subject of attention:

Gan euery wight that hadde nought to done
 More in the place out of the chaumbre gon;
 And euere mo so sterneliche it ron,
 And blew ther-with so wondirliche loude,
 That wel neigh no man heren other koude.

Troilus and Cryseide, III 675-679

Thus, as noted before, medieval acoustic space is only called into being as and when sound is produced and it will not permit emptiness; seeking to avoid any given sound will only bring one into contact with another:

there be manye that fleen occupacioun of the worlde and taken hem to reste bot there with thei ben not occupied wyth vertues· and therfore ofte fithes it falleth that the more sikerly that they cesse fro outwarde occupacioun the more largely thei gedre in to hem by ydelnesse the noyse of vnclene thouztis.

Nicolas Love, *Mirroure of the blessed lyf of Jesu Christ*, 160

Therefore it is very rare to find a depiction of a mutual relationship between sounds being part of the same aural experience. Consequently, echo is seldom mentioned and, when it is, the phenomenon is usually described as sounds consecutively answering one another rather than creating a uniform hearing experience:

Ecco is þe reboundyng of noyse.

John Trevisa's translation of Bartholomaeus' Anglicus's *De Proprietatibus Rerum*, 1.189

Eccho is a voys þat reboundyth azen, whan a man spekyth azen a wode.

Jacob's Well, 150/13

In the rare cases when echo is described in terms of a relationship between two distinct sounds (the sound giving rise to the echo and the echo itself), we come closest to the modern idea of the aural perspective:

Hunteres vnhardeled bi a holt syde; Rocheres roungen bi rys for rurde of her hornes.

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, 1698

They hurled togydirs and brake their spearys..that all the castell range of their dyntys.

Thomas Malory, *Le Morte Darthur*, 487

Than they fought togiders, that the noyse and the sowne range by the watir and woode.

Thomas Malory, *Le Morte Darthur*, 56

It is important to note that, even in these cases, the description does not presuppose a location in the acoustic space which would correspond to an individual point of view limited by the specificity of individual perception; instead, we have a generalised relationship between two distinct, two-dimensional aural plains existing independently of the actual position of anyone present at the scene.

This brings us to another vital concept in our discussion of the medieval experience of hearing sounds, namely silence. In modern understanding, the notion of silence is strongly dependent on our tendency to think of sound as filling a pre-existing potential acoustic space. Within the medieval understanding, the word “silence” as used in the overwhelming majority texts and sources invariably means refraining from speaking, or an absence of human speech in general:

Fulofte my silence I breke.

J. Gower *Confessio Amantis*, I, 1302

for ye haan ful ofte assayed my grete silence and my gret pacience. And eek how wel that I kan hyde and hele thynges that men oghte secreely to hyde.

G. Chaucer *The Tale of Melibee*, 2280

that myracle brou3te forth scilence to hem that wolde afterward meyntene that querel.

John Trevisa’s translation of Ranulf Higden’s *Polychronicon*

That we..eschewe superfluyte..and namely in spekyngge, for..silence is a grete vertue.

Nicholas Love, *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*, 53

Thus, the idea that it is the absence of sound that calls the acoustic space into being is quite alien to contemporaneous sensibilities. It seems, in fact, that the only way to mentally define silence in an absence of a preconceived “spatial” template is to relate it to the absent, potential act of speech. Such a mental tendency is not especially surprising in an age when it was believed that any form of material interaction was ultimately driven by an act of will, or a natural inclination stemming from one. Now, with the concept of physical law comes the idea of a pre-existent set of conditions in which any

such interaction happens. This, in turn, helps to create the notion of a potential void template ready for an automatic chain of action and reaction to which the operation of natural laws has been reduced through the advent of empirical science.

In conclusion, it seems pertinent to state two important points. First, it should be noted that the examples illustrating the specific modes of mental perception of the Middle Ages represent the pinnacle of eloquence in expressing medieval habits of mind. They also stand at the threshold of the transformation into the modern age, as symbolised by the Cartesian revolution in philosophy which made the individual point of view the basis of any ontological orientation in the material universe and the spiritual sphere.

Secondly, while the medieval mode of perception remains markedly different from the contemporary context, it should not be seen as being in any way inferior or indicative of weaker powers of imagination or aesthetic sensitivity; it is evident that some of the most articulate and subtle artistic expressions of the intricacy of human condition have been created on the basis of the medieval cognitive model.

As we now move on from the rhetorical eloquence of the Eagle to the more familiar mental habits of the modern age, we attempt to trace how key literary texts which carry on the grand tradition of heroic literature into our times relate to the medieval cultural tradition in the specific aspect of perception and cognition of sound.

II. Sound and Acoustic Space in the Work of J. R. R. Tolkien

Let us now consider how the aural perception aspects of the medieval cognitive model may have affected the literary work of J. R. R. Tolkien. It is perfectly possible that the underlying tendencies determining the fundamentals of human cognition are, to a large degree, specific to a particular culture and a particular age; in this case, the overall cognitive sensitivity is not for the author to choose, unless with the artistic aim to recreate a bygone sensibility. Since such an exercise formed no part of Tolkien's sub-creative design, we would

not expect anything other than the modern aural sensitivity asserting itself in the verbal texture of the secondary world of his heroic fantasy.

Nevertheless, Tolkien's work offers a unique take on the interaction between the medieval model of perception and modern sensibility for two important reasons. First, it constitutes a body of work which represents the most direct continuation of the medieval literary tradition in our age, developed by an author whose understanding of and appreciation for the medieval cultural model is arguably unmatched. As such, the resulting work can be expected to preserve, or recreate, as much of the original medieval context as possible.

Additionally, heroic fantasy is uniquely positioned for studying such aspects as spatial or aural perception by virtue of the fact that its imagery and setting is, nominally at least, designed not to contain elements other than those reflecting the realities of the medieval period.

In fact, even if we confine ourselves solely to the study of the acoustic world of *The Lord of the Rings*, we find our effort rewarded with discovering much fine interplay between the modern day aural sensibility and the cognitive propensities reminiscent of the old model.

However, before we plunge ourselves in the pursuit of the intricacies of verbal usage and imaginative interplay found amid the epic's rich textual fabric, let us allow ourselves a glimpse at the epistemological perspective which emerges from the bulk of the *Legendarium*. Here, as we witness the creation and the song of the Ainur marking the beginning of time in the *Ainulindalë*,³ we become aware how the modern notion of the preconceived acoustic space which Tolkien inherits from his age is reformulated for a narrative in which the spirit of the cosmogonic myth will admit no automatic causality:

and a sound arose of endless interchanging melodies woven in harmony that passed beyond hearing into the depths and into the heights, and the places of the dwelling of Ilúvatar were filled to overflowing, and the music and the echo of the music went out into the Void, and it was not void.

The Silmarillion, 8

³ For more background on *Ainulindalë* compare Devaux 2007: 81-110; Houghton 2003: 171-182; Eden 2003: 181-193.

On first impression we find here the familiar notion of a pre-existing empty “void” gradually filled with matter and sound in the act of creation which, ever since being enshrined in John Milton’s epic narrative, has become the staple of our literary visions of the cosmic beginning of all things. Yet, for all the similarities, we find here no realm of Chaos, seemingly co-eternal with the Empyrean, whose emptiness is the measure of infinity. What we do find in Tolkien is a pre-conceived empty space providing a template which is filled by the invading sound, instead of being created by it (as would be the medieval way). It is the penetrating sound which provides, or becomes, the only definable form of that acoustic space, thereby giving it actual existence (just as form gives matter its existence in classical philosophy):

In the midst of this strife, whereat the halls of Ilúvatar shook and a tremor ran out into the silences yet unmoved, Ilúvatar arose a third time, and his face was terrible to behold.

The Silmarillion, 10

Thus, the spiritual power behind the music of the Ainur makes the acoustic space of the Void definable, just as the soul gives a definable form to the material body which otherwise would not properly exist without it.

All this determines the mutual relationship between sound and silence throughout the many thousands of years measuring the history of the many species inhabiting Arda. Throughout *The Silmarillion* silence is never once referred to as mere absence of sound; it is always an outcome of an act of will, even if it is not directly related to anyone refraining from speaking. Silence invariably defines an aura of a portentous moment in time, and the connotation is mainly one of tragedy and grief. This fact remains persistently true across all the Ages of Arda; we see it at the death of Míriel, the first wife of Finwë:

She went then to the gardens of Lórien and lay down to sleep; but though she seemed to sleep, her spirit indeed departed from her body, and passed in silence to the halls of Mandos.

The Silmarillion, 71

Again, silence is the main characteristic of the unnatural state of grief and bewilderment engulfing Valinor in the wake of Morgoth and Ungoliant's destruction of the Trees:

There was silence in Valinor, and no sound could be heard, save only from afar there came on the wind through the pass of the mountains the wailing of the Teleri like the cold cry of gulls.

The Silmarillion, 88

Later on, the same ominous, foreboding silence accompanies the trials and tragedies which befall the Noldor following their return to Middle-earth, as we find illustrated by the history of the Gondolin:

When at last they returned and their tale was told there was great sorrow in Gondolin; and Turgon sat long alone, enduring grief and anger in silence.

The Silmarillion, 164

Yet he did not reveal his heart: and though not all things went as he would he endured it in silence, hiding his mind so that few could read it, unless it were Idril Celebrindal.

The Silmarillion, 174

We encounter the same motif again in the history of the kingdom of Doriath and in the story of Beren and Lúthien:

The Orcs growing ever bolder wandered at will far and wide, coming down Sirion in the west and Colon in the east, and they encompassed Doriath; and they harried the lands so that beast and bird fled before them, and silence and desolation spread steadily from the North.

The Silmarillion, 197

But Lúthien was silent, and from that hour she sang not again in Doriath. A brooding silence fell upon the woods, and the shadows lengthened in the kingdom of Thingol.

The Silmarillion, 213

Upon Doriath evil days had fallen. Grief and silence had come upon all its people when Lúthien was lost.

The Silmarillion, 233

Finally, the silence of impending doom returns in the history of the human race to mark the moment of the Númenóreans' desperate expedition against Valinor:

Thus the fleets of the Númenóreans moved against the menace of the West; and there was little wind, but they had many oars and many strong slaves to row beneath the lash. The sun went down, and there came a great silence.

The Silmarillion, 359

Thus, unsurprisingly for a universe born of a song, silence is invariably an unnatural state of the world suspended in a motionless paralysis caused by the collapse of the natural order of things. It is a state of the ever-weaving music of Creation being stopped by an event contrary to its most organic need of motion. Silence is here devoid of any specific spatial coordinates; it does not denote a physical condition of the environment, but it is conjured by the spiritual sense of a situation where the cosmic dance of Creation is temporarily put on hold by the build-up of evil which obscures it. Hence silence does not denote any form of emptiness, or lack of sound – it is in fact itself an intense form of an aural experience. In other words, silence emerges as a temporary pause in the music of Creation whose commencement marks the beginning of time. Since the music itself is, for Tolkien, the manifestation of the divine Logos, and its gradual unveiling embodies the link which binds Creation to its original source and purpose, then silence is duly conceived of as marking the time when this link and purpose become obscured as the onslaught of evil causes the distance between the two to widen.

We further note that, while this pattern accounts for most of the cases when silence occurs, it is not the only one. In fact, on certain occasions silence can be a signifier of a special kind of awe and reverence which a particularly rare moment in time may call for. In such cases, silence will mark, by its presence, a pivotal event in the history of Creation. As is proper for a mythical narrative, this pattern is initiated by Ilúvatar himself as he chooses to hallow the beginning of the Valar descending into the created universe by a spell of meditative quiet:

For it is said that after the departure of the Valar there was silence, and for an age Ilúvatar sat alone in thought.

The Silmarillion, 36

As we take another step down the mythical ladder of antecedents, we note a similar event of intense hierophanic importance marked by a reverent silence, as the creation witnesses with hushed awe the planting of Telperion and Laurelin by Yavanna in Valinor, marking the moment when the material Creation is instantaneously penetrated by divine mystery:

And as they watched, upon the mound there came forth two slender shoots; and silence was over all the world in that hour, nor was there any other sound save the chanting of Yavanna.

The Silmarillion, 32

Thus, silence also carries the function of marking the beginning of momentous events and processes in the history of Creation. In this context, it is important to note that the awakening of the First-born is also marked by silence until the arrival of Melian brings the music of Creation with her:

and in that time when the Quendi awoke beside the waters of Cuiviénen she departed from Valinor and came to the Hither Lands, and there she filled the silence of Middle-earth before the dawn with her voice and the voices of her birds.

The Silmarillion, 58

This hierophanic, spiritual quality of silence is also notable in the comment on the Valar's mode of communication:

For the Valar may work many things with thought rather than with hands, and without voices in silence they may hold council one with another,

The Silmarillion, 117

Here, as in the preceding passages, silence becomes a sign of the superior, non-corporeal nature of the Valar, and, just as the sound of Creation cowers before the presence of evil, so it reverently makes

way for more refined forms of existence whose purity is the sign of their more direct link with the source of all life.

With all this in mind we can now explore the complex texture of *The Lord of the Rings*. It is perhaps not particularly surprising to note that references to the aural experience which would be most characteristic of the old model reassert themselves most emphatically in passages where the conscious stylisation forms a part of an overt design to achieve the air of high verbal register by archaisation; this also relates their semantic range most directly to what we saw in *The Silmarillion*. This is most evident when we look again at the use of the word “silence” in these passages, as first noted in the chronicle style in the appendices:

It was in the reign of Araphant in the North and of Ondoher son of Calimehtar in the South that the two kingdoms again took counsel together after long silence and estrangement.

The Return of the King, 1373-4

We encounter the word again in the same semantic context in the final conversation between Arwen and Aragorn:

“Nay, dear lord,” she said, “that choice is long over. There is now no ship that would bear me hence, and I must indeed abide the Doom of Men, whether I will or I nill: the loss and the silence.

The Return of the King, 1394

It is telling that in both cases the word “silence” is paired with a companion word which strengthens it semantically in its destined sense of privation and aridity. As they are bound closer together by an alliterative link, they in effect gain a lot of the irrevocable sonority of a formulaic collocation.

Examples of such use of the word “silence”, where the primary connotation is one of defeat which ushers in an ascent of evil, are in fact numerous throughout *The Lord of the Rings*. We learn that after the fall of Númenor, the disembodied Sauron “re-entered Mordor, and hid there for a time in silence” (*The Return of the King*, 1357), and at the council of Elrond in Rivendell we learn from Glóin that, after the defeat of Balin, “there was silence, and no word has ever come

from Moria since” (*The Fellowship of the Ring*, 313). Finally, we read about the wounded treated for the Black Shadow in the Houses of the Healing:

And those who were stricken with it fell slowly into an ever deeper dream, and then passed to silence and a deadly cold, and so died.

The Return of the King, 1126

From this meaning of “silence” we move on to passages where, while not losing the context of death, we approach a more positive spiritual context, as happens, for instance, with the withered royal tree of Gondor:

Then the withered tree was uprooted, but with reverence; and they did not burn it, but laid it to rest in the silence of Rath Dínen.

The Return of the King, 1273

Thus, as the ancient tree is reverently buried in the hallowed ground, some spiritual light is gently shed upon the silence of separation and decay of the fallen world of Middle-earth. As is no wonder in a fallen world, making room for a more direct contact with the spiritual does not come as natural as was the case in the relatively more pristine context of *The Silmarillion*; it now has to be more consciously retrieved by means of a formally instituted ceremony:

But when, after the Standing Silence, wine was brought there came in two esquires to serve the kings; or so they seemed to be: one was clad in the silver and sable of the Guards of Minas Tirith, and the other in white and green.

The Return of the King, 1251

Let us now follow the semantic connotations of “silence” in passages where the narrative comes into more direct contact with modern novelistic conventions, which, needless to say, had developed in the context of modern aural perception. The concept of silence will be now defined with reference to the acoustic and spatial context of particular scenes. Consequently, in accordance with modern sensibilities, we conceive of silence not as a negation of the acoustic space,

but as one of the possible ways in which the immanent surrounding acoustic space may be experienced by a character:

There was a silence in the empty fields, and Gimli could hear the air moving in the grass.

The Two Towers, 559

Thus, silence in *The Lord of the Rings* is an ever present background which constantly accompanies the characters and constitutes an element of sonic setting to each consecutive scene, just like in the spatial dimension each scene is set within the predefined confines of the spatial frame within which the material objects are located:

The sun rose and passed overhead unseen, and began to sink, and the light through the trees to the west grew golden; and always they walked in cool green shadow, and all about them was silence.

The Two Towers, 910

He sat for a moment half dreaming, listening to the noise of water, the whisper of dark trees, the crack of stone, and the vast waiting silence that brooded behind all sound.

The Return of the King, 1036

This in itself could be seen as amounting to little more than the standard way in which silence would manifest itself in a literary text written in accordance with modern day aural sensibilities; however, a more incisive look at just the quoted passages reveals that silence plays a much more active role in Tolkien's epic than in most modern fiction. It may indeed seem that in Tolkien's fiction the sustained presence of the potential aural background (which will necessarily manifest itself as silence in the modern sense) is treated with something like the attention granted to it within the old medieval model. It is as if the neutral aural frame of modern sound perception is perceived in the old way – as an absence of sound caused by an act of will. This presupposes a presence of an active, independent volitional agent, who communicates equally well through sound as through its absence. Consequently, in the imagery of *The Lord of the Rings* one never truly achieves the state of a neutral emptiness of

an aural canvas deprived of the positive quality of sound; instead, we end up with the situation where aural feedback constitutes an ever-present element of the imagery contributing to each successive scene, be it in the form of sound or silence.

Let us explore this phenomenon in more detail. First, as already noted, it is important that the silences which the characters of *The Lord of the Rings* encounter are almost never mere neutral absences of sound. In fact, in the overwhelming majority of cases, silence is an active element of the surrounding aural space and remains in constant interaction with the focalising characters affecting their cognitive functions and mental state. For this reason it is a constant feature of Tolkien's prose that the word "silence" is invariably qualified by an adjective relating to mood and usually having the effect of anthropomorphising silence. Thus, silence can be "heavy", such as when Gandalf reveals the story of the One Ring to Frodo (*The Fellowship of the Ring*, 77), when Denethor recognises the horn of Boromir (*The Return of the King*, 988), or during the confrontation between king Théoden and Gandalf with Saruman (*The Two Towers*, 755). It may be "obstinate", such as encountered by Bilbo during his farewell speech at his birthday party in the Shire (*The Fellowship of the Ring*, 39). Then again the silence surrounding Sam and Frodo before their meeting with Faramir in Ithilien (*The Two Towers*, 862-3), as well as that experienced by Merry and Pippin at the Moots of the Ents (*The Two Towers*, 631), is "a listening silence", while the silence Sam has to struggle with during his night watch while passing through the land of Eregion is a "dead silence" (*The Fellowship of the Ring*, 370). Moreover, the silence Frodo and Sam encounter in the lair of Shelob is a "heavy padded silence" (*The Two Towers*, 941). Silence can also be "dreadful", such as the one Aragorn encounters during his journey into Paths of the Dead under Dwimorberg (*The Return of the King*, 1031). Merry experiences a "vast waiting silence" during his journey through Harrowdale (*The Return of the King*, 1036). Finally, as Sam and Frodo are approaching the gates of Mordor they are treated to "a black silence" (*The Two Towers*, 808-809), and then an "enfolding silence" (*The Two Towers*, 843).

Indeed, the process of anthropomorphising silence is enhanced when verbs are called in to augment the work of the adjectives. This is evident in the words of Faramir to Frodo and Sam:

This also I must tell you. My scouts and watchers have all returned, even some that have crept within sight of the Morannon. They all find a strange thing. The land is empty. Nothing is on the road, and no sound of foot, or horn, or bowstring is anywhere to be heard. A waiting silence broods above the Nameless Land. I do not know what this portends.

The Two Towers, 908

While the animate quality of silence is conveyed in *The Lord of the Rings* in a variety of ways, it is true to say that the connotations conjured up by an absence of sound are invariably sinister and so the context in which silence becomes an active agent is always negative. Thus, similarly to Faramir, Aragorn takes the absence of sound to automatically mean an ominous portent; this determines his reaction to the eerie quiet of the land of Hollin, and later the corresponding condition of the lands of the Rohirrim:

‘No indeed,’ he answered. ‘But I miss something. I have been in the country of Hollin in many seasons. No folk dwell here now, but many other creatures live here at all times, especially birds. Yet now all things but you are silent. I can feel it. There is no sound for miles about us, and your voices seem to make the ground echo. I do not understand it.

The Fellowship of the Ring, 370

Often Aragorn wondered that they saw no sign of beast or man. The dwellings of the Rohirrim were for the most part many leagues away to the South, under the wooded eaves of the White Mountains, now hidden in mist and cloud; yet the Horse-lords had formerly kept many herds and studs in the Eastemnet, this easterly region of their realm, and there the herdsmen had wandered much, living in camp and tent, even in winter-time. But now all the land was empty, and there was a silence that did not seem to be the quiet of peace. [...]

He gazed back along the way that they had come towards the night gathering in the East. ‘There is something strange at work in this land. I distrust the silence.

The Two Towers, 555-556

There are many passages in *The Lord of the Rings* where the relationship between the characters and the surrounding silence becomes an intensely physical experience conveying a sense of an

almost oppressive presence rather than being a neutral condition of an absence of sound:

The sun rose and passed overhead unseen, and began to sink, and the light through the trees to the west grew golden; and always they walked in cool green shadow, and all about them was silence. The birds seemed all to have flown away or to have fallen dumb.

The Two Towers, 910

Then the silence grew until even Sam felt it. [...] Dead silence was around him, and over all hung a clear blue sky, as the Sun rode up from the East.

The Fellowship of the Ring, 370

The day drew on. A deep silence fell upon the little grey hollow where they lay, so near to the borders of the land of fear: a silence that could be felt, as if it were a thick veil that cut them off from all the world about them. Above them was a dome of pale sky barred with fleeting smoke, but it seemed high and far away, as if seen through great depths of air heavy with brooding thought.

The Two Towers, 842

The feeling of dread passed, but the enfolding silence was broken. For some time they had been cut off from the world, as if in an invisible island; now they were laid bare again, peril had returned. But still Frodo did not speak to Gollum or make his choice. His eyes were closed, as if he were dreaming, or looking inward into his heart and memory.

The Two Towers, 843

The stars shone through the window and the silence of the heavens seemed to be round him. He spoke at last out of his wonder and a sudden fear of that silence: 'Who are you, Master?' he asked.

The Fellowship of the Ring, 171-2

Although in their underlying sense the above passages do not presuppose anything else than a physical experience of silence as being essentially a projection of a given character's mental state, the way this sensation is projected in the imagery of the scene relies on making silence into something which amounts to an animate being which is always potentially ready to interact with its environment. Because silence remains essentially a privation of the positive quality

of the experience of sound (despite its living status), its ontological character determines its negative role as an agent of evil – silence effectively relates to sound in the same way in which darkness relates to light, and ultimately evil relates to good. This is the reason for silence's ever-present proneness for expansion and its tendency to prey on any sign of mental or physical weakness of any of the characters. It seems that by its expansion separates the character from its environment in a way which is parallel to how the Ring acts upon the individual's mental faculties and their relation to the Light of Creation; it also makes silence very much like Ungoliant in its character. It may indeed be the case that in a state of acute anxiety silence may be audible to a character as a sinister background to the sounds they hear, making even a potentially neutral sound acquire negative undertones as it rebounds off the underlying silence, twisting it out of proportion and transforming it into a grotesque mockery. This happens to Sam Gamgee in the corridors of Cirith Ungol:

Terror was beginning to grip him again. There was no sound save the rap of his feet, which seemed to grow to an echoing noise, like the slapping of great hands upon the stones.

The Return of the King, 1182

It is also possible for silence to be conjured out of its surroundings by the experience of hearing sounds coming out of different locations. This is illustrated by the passage where the awareness of silence is a product of the apprehension raised by the appearance of two distinct sounds which turn silence into an element transforming the characters' experience of their surroundings by drawing their attention to the hostile emptiness of the aural space around them. Somewhat paradoxically, therefore, it is by functioning along the lines of modern sensibility, i.e. providing a background aural template, that silence assumes the sinister presence that makes it the key element in the characters' perception of their environment which determines their overall reaction to it:

A long-drawn wail came down the wind, like the cry of some evil and lonely creature. It rose and fell, and ended on a high piercing note. Even as they sat and stood, as if suddenly frozen, it was answered by another cry, fainter

and further off, but no less chilling to the blood. There was then a silence, broken only by the sound of the wind in the leaves.

The Fellowship of the Ring, 118

Worse still, the experience of the hostile, overwhelming kind of silence may produce the disorienting sensation of hearing either non-existent sounds or sounds on the verge of hearing, which naturally puts a strain on the character's mental faculties. A good example is found in passages describing Frodo and Sam being tracked by Gollum as they walk the ridges of the Emyr Muil:

Sometimes in the silence of that barren country they fancied that they heard faint sounds behind them, a stone falling, or the imagined step of flapping feet on the rock. But if they halted and stood still listening, they heard no more, nothing but the wind sighing over the edges of the stones – yet even that reminded them of breath softly hissing through sharp teeth.

The Two Towers, 789-90

This has a realistic psychological justification in the imagination struggling to make sense of an unknown dangerous environment, at least within the context of novelistic narrative techniques. However, in a deeper sense this can always be the penchant of the powers of evil to work upon their prey by means of the destructive nature of illusion. The notion of illusion underscores the basic medieval idea of all unnatural forms of magic; the illusion of sound evoked by the sinister silence creates an array of aural shadows whose unreal quality makes them an instrument of temptation, first into fearful restlessness, then blind terror, and finally into the depths of powerlessness and despair. This is largely because the illusory sounds immerse each character in their own individual aural perception, making them distrustful not just of the environment but also of one another, separating them from the objective reality where the comfort of familiar company and the reinvigorating echo of the music of Creation is found and cherished.

All this makes silence into a natural ally of the evil side; in turn, it justifies its predominantly bad reputation in Tolkien's work:

The hosts of Isengard were advancing in silence now.

The Two Towers, 694

Let us expand on how silence coexists with sound in the imagery of *The Lord of the Rings*. This is significant because silence can only play a positive role in a given scene when it is juxtaposed with sound, as shown in the passage describing Merry riding with the Host of the Rohirrim to the help of the beleaguered Gondor:

He sat for a moment half dreaming, listening to the noise of water, the whisper of dark trees, the crack of stone, and the vast waiting silence that brooded behind all sound.

The Return of the King, 1036

It is notable that although the wording is nearly identical to Far-amir's words spoken to the hobbits at Henneth Annûn, the mention of the sounds blossoming atop the ever-present silence makes it lose its previous menacing character to become an essentially positive experience. Nowhere is this clearer than in the passage describing Gimli's torment during his journey through the Paths of the Dead under the Ered Nimrais:

Suddenly he heard the tinkle of water, a sound hard and clear as a stone falling into a dream of dark shadow.

The Return of the King, 1033

The solid, objective, verifiable quality of the experience of a definite sound allows the character to relate to the surrounding space which has the power to shake his consciousness out of the overwhelmingly subjective experience of silence which draws him ever deeper into fenced-in insecurity. Again, it is the dreamlike, unreal quality of silence and its capacity for delusion which evokes unease and fear by any antagonistic forces, natural or spiritual.

The relationship between sound and silence in Tolkien's work is made all the more complex by the fact that on some occasions silence may bring about a pleasant experience of sound:

At length a silence fell, and they heard the music of the waterfall running sweetly in the shadows.

The Fellowship of the Ring, 441

After they had eaten, Goldberry sang many songs for them, songs that began merrily in the hills and fell softly down into silence; and in the silences they saw in their minds pools and waters wider than any they had known, and looking into them they saw the sky below them and the stars like jewels in the depths.

The Fellowship of the Ring, 173

Here we see how sound and silence feed off one another in a subtle relationship whereby silence either envelops sound in a way which brings out and amplifies its inherent subtleness, or else takes on the soothing quality of the fading sound and extends its effect, transforming it into the kind of meditative poise which we have already seen in *The Silmarillion*.

Examples of a similar technique are found elsewhere in Tolkien's writings dealing with the living mythical reality of the First Age of Arda, for example in the last narrative of *The Fall of Gondolin*:

Then Tuor was filled with wonder and stayed his song, and slowly the music died in the hills, and there was silence. And then amid the silence he heard in the air above him a strange cry;

Of Tuor and the Fall of Gondolin (last version, 1950), 156-157

One fundamental thing about the role and function of the concept of silence in Tolkien is that it is rarely an objectively neutral condition of the environment; rather, it is a quasi-animate entity actively entering into contact with the characters, frequently playing a decisive role in determining their perception. As such, the phenomenon of silence becomes subjectivised and transformed into a part of individual character's cognitive capability. Because the omniscient narrator chooses to focalise such passages from within the characters perception, silence effectively loses its status as an independently-existing acoustic canvas – a template which is to be filled by sound. Instead, it represents an acoustic phenomenon in its own right which competes with sound for the character's attention; it also interacts with sound in a way designed to bring out the finer points of cognitive subtlety from the characters' perception of their environment.

A significant example in this context is the scene at the council in Rivendell, when the question concerning the prospective "messengers"

who are to be sent with the Ring is followed by a spell of brooding silence. After the exchanges between Bilbo and Gandalf comes the protracted moment before Frodo declares himself to be ready to undertake the “burden”, with the intense silence of all those present at the Council coexisting with the sound of the noon-bell:

No one answered. The noon-bell rang. Still no one spoke. Frodo glanced at all the faces, but they were not turned to him. All the Council sat with downcast eyes, as if in deep thought. A great dread fell on him, as if he was awaiting the pronouncement of some doom that he had long foreseen and vainly hoped might after all never be spoken.

The Fellowship of the Ring, 352

Significantly, the world “silence” is not used to describe what is going on in the narrative at the moment, which underscores the multi-layered structure of the sonic landscape conjured in the passage. The acoustic layout is already complex, since the halls of El-rond are filled with the sound of the bell expanding into the furthest reaches of the acoustic space. Nevertheless, the sheer intensity which emanates from the concerted abstention from speech by the Council pushes the sound of the bell into a counterpoint position against the sensation of silence experienced by the characters, and augmenting its effect as a result. Consequently, as sound coexists with silence, the role of the sound is to underscore the overwhelming sensation of the absence of speech; this, in turn, adds sonority to this particular point in the narrative.

It should be noted that if we were to examine all this in the context of our discussion on the medieval model of space perception, we would come to the conclusion that the pattern of interaction between silence and sound brings the philosophy behind the aural experience significantly closer to the medieval type of cognition than would otherwise be expected. More precisely, the Tolkienian model of acoustic imagery starts with the standard modern-day realist conception allowing for a pre-existing potential acoustic space and anthropomorphising its potentially neutral condition of silence through the internal perception of the characters, ending up in a situation whereby silence is not the condition of the acoustic template prior to

sound, but it is conceived of as an alternative to it. Thus, in a round-about way, we arrive at a model where the notion of a pre-existing acoustic space is effectively gone, although it lies at the foundation of the Tolkienian concept of silence as an element of the imagery.

The reason for all this is that Tolkien's concept of the fictional world, and consequently the underlying philosophy determining his choice of narrative techniques, never loses sight of the mythical quality of the story which, on its basic, narrative level, is unveiled within a reality which is not ultimate even in the fictional subcreation. As in this world nothing exists purely to accommodate the basic necessities of the processes of Nature, then nothing is truly neutral in its ultimate meaning and significance, since all things and phenomena are either an element in the fulfilment of the music of the Ainur, or else have been perverted to obstruct it.

To put it more clearly, let us refer to the pristinely mythical reality of the First Age and the last narrative of Tuor and the fall of Gondolin, with the scene when Tuor enters the abandoned halls of King Turgon in Vanyamar:

Then Tuor went up the wide stairs, now half-hidden in thrift campion, and he passed under the mighty lintel and entered the shadows of the house of Turgon; and he came at last to a high-pillared hall. If great it had appeared from without, now vast and wonderful it seemed to Tuor from within, and for awe he wished not to awake the echoes in its emptiness. Nothing could he see there, save at the eastern end a high seat upon a dais, and softly as he might he paced towards it; but the sound of his feet rang upon the paved floor as the steps of doom, and echoes ran before him along the pillared aisles. [...]

Then Tuor spoke, and his voice rang as a challenge in the roof [...]

Of Tuor and the Fall of Gondolin (last version, 1950), 162

The reverberation of Tuor's steps in the empty halls of Turgon's palace does not constitute an example of sound invading a vacant aural space, because the silence resident in the halls of Vanyamar has come to represent the former glory of the royal House of the Noldor and the tragedy of its decline. Thus, over time it acquired enough personality to compete with the doomed quest of Tuor and hold enough meaning to invest its presence with substance which

goes beyond the neutrality of a preconceived background, since its existence in this specific place is the result of the gradual unveiling of a major Providential design. Sound brings new meaning to a place to compete with and transform the meaning of silence. Since Tuor is not currently aware of his journey being a quest, his voice is never consciously meant as a “challenge”; it becomes so because, on the level of the sensory reality, the interplay of sound and silence is a reflection of the Doom of Mandos competing with the purposes of Ulmo.

We now move from examining the function of silence in Tolkien’s work to consider the role of sound. By investigating the use and semantic range of the term “noise”, the first striking thing is the extent to which numerous passages in *The Lord of the Rings* depend on the use of alliterative collocations. Interestingly, “noise” itself does not form part of any such constructions; this is not surprising given the fact that, as discussed above, in this alliterative tradition of poetic composition, its Middle English descendant was a low-born lexical item, destined to appear in the low-register line position.⁴ However, Tolkien’s prose repeatedly features passages where the idea of loud noise is expressed as syntactic constructions based on a repeated set of words descending from what would have been the [r] alliterative cluster in an average formulaic grid for alliterative verse:

At that moment there came a roaring and a rushing: a noise of loud waters rolling many stones.

The Fellowship of the Ring, 280

The Towers of the Teeth swayed, tottered, and fell down; the mighty rampart crumbled; the Black Gate was hurled in ruin; and from far away, now dim, now growing, now mounting to the clouds, there came a drumming rumble, a roar, a long echoing roll of ruinous noise.

The Return of the King, 1242

Distant but deep there came up on the wind a roaring sound like the roll of thunder heard far away.

The Fellowship of the Ring, 513

⁴ For more on the aspect of register in formulaic composition see Borroff (1962: 52-90).

At that moment the rock quivered and trembled beneath them. The great rumbling noise, louder than ever before, rolled in the ground and echoed in the mountains.

The Two Towers, 923

Here, although “noise” itself does not take part in the alliterative interplay, the alliteration brought into these passages artfully weaves its way around the central concept making it the focus of the imagery. The uniform, nearly monolithic nature of these passages seems to be a part of a conscious design to create a firm lexical reference point for this sort of aural experience. Thus, arguably, its usefulness goes well beyond the mere fact of the obvious onomatopoeic embroidery of modern prose to echo some deeper traditions.

This in itself forms a consistent technique of subtle archaisation, which could be why “noise” is frequently used when “sound” would be preferable in a purely realist narrative approach. This is clear in the present argument, as well as passages such as the one below concerning Sam:

[..] he heard two noises; one loud, and the other soft but very clear. One was the splash of something heavy falling into the water; the other was a noise like the snick of a lock when a door quietly closes fast.

The Fellowship of the Ring, 154

Despite this fact, the introduction of the word “sound” does not mean change of style or method; if “sound” is not used, it frequently appears in passages with emphatic alliteration, which brings Tolkien’s style close to alliterative poetic composition, or poetic forms descending from it rather than typical realist prose:

Down below among the roots there was the sound of creatures crawling and snuffling.

The Fellowship of the Ring, 141

There came the soft sound of horses led with stealth along the lane (...)

The Fellowship of the Ring, 230

Frodo woke from deep sleep, suddenly, as if some sound or presence had disturbed him.

The Fellowship of the Ring, 232

They crossed the Bridge in safety, hearing no sound but the water swirling against its three great arches.

The Fellowship of the Ring, 263

So far there had been no sign or sound of pursuit that the hobbits could see or hear (...)

The Fellowship of the Ring, 277

(...) there came a soft sound: a swish, followed by a plop, as if a fish had disturbed the still surface of the water.

The Fellowship of the Ring, 397

Then he heard faintly a sound like sniffing; and something seemed to be scabbling on the bark of the tree-trunk (...)

The Fellowship of the Ring, 449

They had been in fear of pursuit for so long that any sound from behind seemed ominous and unfriendly.

The Fellowship of the Ring, 273

Some of the passages reach high levels of finesse as they rely on the interplay of two different alliterative sounds.

In terms of the two words' respective semantic range, the word "sound" functions here less as a generic term for any acoustic stimuli; instead, it is closer to the function it had in the medieval system of aural reference – namely, it functions more like a specific term which denotes the smaller-scale, non-invasive, local kind of acoustic stimuli. As such, it does not incorporate noise in its semantic range of reference, but rather stands in opposition to it.

Another notable thing in the context of the above passages is that, for all their lexical traditionalism, they convey some decidedly modern features of aural sensibility. When we consider the last two quotations including "noise", we encounter the phenomenon of dynamic aural perspective. In fact, the effect of a sound moving closer to or further from the character focalising the imagery of a given

scene is, on average, of greater significance in Tolkien than for a standard omniscient narrator:

But the noise grew closer.

The Two Towers, 863

The singing drew nearer.

The Fellowship of the Ring, 103

Tom soon disappeared in front of them, and the noise of his singing got fainter and further away.

The Fellowship of the Ring, 158

They stopped suddenly and stood as silent as treeshadows, listening. There was a sound of hoofs in the lane, some way behind, but coming slow and clear down the wind.

The Fellowship of the Ring, 102

They climbed upwards a little: it seemed cold and the noise of the stream had become faint.

The Two Towers, 880

Horns sounded at some distance, and the noise of cheering rolled towards them like a gathering wind.

The Return of the King, 1008

They were just beginning to scramble out, when suddenly they heard what they had all been dreading: hoofs on the road ahead. The sound was coming towards them.

The Fellowship of the Ring, 126

The reason for the frequent use of the dynamically unveiling aural perspective is that, as it naturally narrows the observer's point of view, it provides an opportunity to introduce narrative suspense in passages of potential dramatic tension; it also makes the focalising character's location in the overall spatial layout of the secondary world more objective and more closely measured against the secondary world's general dimensions. Thus, invoking the aural experience is subordinated to highlighting the role of space in the imagery of

the narrative. This is understandable when we are faced with a quest narrative in a secondary world within a literary tradition whereby the effect of subcreation is to bring out the spiritual core from the human existential experience. In this context, it is no wonder that the spatial ramifications of the imagery reflect the character's position regarding the ethics embodied in the texture of the secondary world in which the quest happens. The experience of hearing comes into play in the progress of the narrative to underscore the importance of the existence of the space surrounding the characters. The aural perspective brings out the sense of spatial distance from the imagery of a particular scene, and it marks the progress of the quest by referring the characters' position with regard to the aural environment to their progress in the quest and, consequently, their spiritual growth. A good illustration of this technique is the description of the aural environment surrounding the company of the hobbits leaving Crickhollow:

Everything was still, and far-away noises seemed near and clear: fowls chattering in a yard, someone closing a door of a distant house.

The Fellowship of the Ring, 143

The chief effect of such a description is to highlight the experience of an expanse of space where the perception of distant sounds projects a bridge through the intervening distance. While one may feel small when measured against the vast stretches of space to be covered in one's destined journey, being sure of one's position in the surrounding space provides a sense of security and belonging. As shown earlier, it is silence which creates a barrier in the perception of and relation to the surrounding space. In Tolkien's secondary world, silence drives characters to lose their moral orientation; it cuts them off from creation as a whole and prevents one from contributing to its overall purpose. Thus, in Tolkien's universe, spatial distance is a measure of duty and a visible sign of moral obligation. It is in this context that we see clearly how the dynamic aural perspective is instrumental in providing a sense of direction; in turn, this underscores the characters' spatial orientation, since it becomes a measure of the distance already covered and the distance they still has to go. As the places visited by the characters in their quest mark successive

stages of their development and the ascending levels of literary and spiritual traditions, so the perspective of sound is used to link them to an organically progressive whole.

A telling example of the aural sensation functioning this way is the passage describing Frodo looking towards Minas Morgul and Cirith Ungol from the top of the forest ridge enveloping the valley of the Anduin after parting from Faramir:

At its bottom ran a hurrying stream: Frodo could hear its stony voice coming up through the silence; and beside it on the hither side a road went winding down like a pale ribbon, down into chill grey mists that no gleam of sunset touched. There it seemed to Frodo that he descried far off, floating as it were on a shadowy sea, the high dim tops and broken pinnacles of old towers forlorn and dark.

The Two Towers, 912

We start with an interplay of sound and silence which ushers in the meditative platform for the contemplation of the distance ahead, implicitly underscored with a sense of obligation which emerges out of the sum of the experience. More specifically, when previously we witnessed examples of silence bringing out the tender quality from sound sprouting in its midst, now it is the delicate sound of the stream that becomes an instrument in evoking a feeling of grandeur from the silent emptiness of the wide expanses of inhospitable terrain still to be covered in the quest.

Each character's initial aural experience marks their interaction with space. What Frodo hears helps him relate to the layout of the regions of Middle-earth he crosses on his quest, but as the spiritual weight of his pilgrimage becomes ever greater, it reminds him of his relationship with the distance covered during his quest, and, consequently, fosters the spiritual growth necessary to answer to the trials he faces along the way.

This is apparent in the passage describing Frodo's dream at Crickhollow:

Then he heard a noise in the distance. At first he thought it was a great wind coming over the leaves of the forest. Then he knew that it was not leaves, but the sound of the Sea far-off; a sound he had never heard in

waking life, though it had often troubled his dreams. Suddenly he found he was out in the open. There were no trees after all. He was on a dark heath, and there was a strange salt smell in the air. Looking up he saw before him a tall white tower, standing alone on a high ridge. A great desire came over him to climb the tower and see the Sea. He started to struggle up the ridge towards the tower: but suddenly a light came in the sky, and there was a noise of thunder.

The Fellowship of the Ring, 142

In Tolkien's subcreated universe, the aural and spatial perspectives become a measure of the character's ethical stance as they emerge from the confines of formal realism to answer the challenge immanent in the quest which brings the ultimate sense to the spatial layout of the subcreated universe. The perspective of sound, as it is with sight, becomes a measure in the battle of wits to command the mental and ethical high ground in the narrative.

In this sense, Frodo's dream is a premonition of the soundless vision he will experience on the summit of Amon Hen, where the aural and spatial perspectives disappear from view as the scope and intensity of the unveiling psychomachia drown the individual point of view in the universality of moral conflict rising in the fabric of the secondary world:

Then here and there the mist gave way and he saw many visions: small and clear as if they were under his eyes upon a table, and yet remote. There was no sound, only bright living images. The world seemed to have shrunk and fallen silent.

The Fellowship of the Ring, 522

Here, as in the examples discussed before, the most direct role of silence is to indicate the insecurity of exposure, of becoming the prey singled out of the protective environment for the predatory attack. The "shrinking" of spatial perspective also means a corresponding narrowing of the acoustic space, and, once again we see a grotesque disturbance of the character's relation to their environment. As previously noted, in *The Silmarillion*, silence is a sign of the music of Creation being temporarily suspended in the wake of the passive negativity of the onslaught of evil; consequently, we see a moment in

time when the powers of darkness are able to temporarily suspend the quest. This is evident in obliterating the protagonist's relationship with their environment, revealed by their response to aural sensations which provide a sense of location and belonging.

The passage describing Frodo's experience on top of Amon Hen is best understood when it is juxtaposed against another one which acts as its exact binary opposite. The passage in question is the description of the Fellowship entering Lothlórien:

They were in a deep lane between the ends of the wall, and passing quickly through it they entered the City of the Trees. No folk could they see, nor hear any feet upon the paths; but there were many voices, about them, and in the air above. Far away up on the hill they could hear the sound of singing falling from on high like soft rain upon leaves,

The Fellowship of the Ring, 460

The aural perspective used here is designed to envelop the characters in the sensation of sound which makes them feel small, cloaked in an aural environment made up of many layers of sound. The concentric layout of this aural template acts as a protective presence where the individual consciousness all but loses its subjectivity and becomes a part of the collective experience of the place with all the security of surrender to reliable and familiar surroundings.

The creation of an acoustic space made up of distinct yet related layers of sound leads us to consider another phenomenon which contributes significantly to the array of techniques Tolkien uses to bring his subcreated reality to life: echo.

In Tolkien's prose, echo is referred to regularly, making it one of the most distinctive aural phenomena of Arda's natural world of sound:

The chasm was long and dark, and filled with the noise of wind and rushing water and echoing stone.

The Fellowship of the Ring, 513

There was still an echo as of following feet in the cutting behind them; a rushing noise as if a wind were rising and pouring through the branches of the pines.

The Fellowship of the Ring, 278

Every now and then we could hear in the distance the rattle and fall of stone, and thudding noises echoing in the hills.

The Two Towers, 742

The great rumbling noise, louder than ever before, rolled in the ground and echoed in the mountains.

The Two Towers, 923

When we look at the majority of instances when echo is used as an element of acoustic imagery as a basic expedient of narration, the phenomenon is essentially neutral, since it is used to indicate both sinister and pleasant aural sensations, with positive connotations dominating.

This is not surprising, and it is explained on the basic level of the narrative techniques used for creating the imagery. Once again we have a dynamic aural perspective as the sound sweeps through the acoustic space transforming it with an ever-growing intensity. In a basic sense, the effect on the imagery is always one of wholeness whereby various elements of the imagery are linked with one another to form a cohesive organic unit. This, in its turn, excludes all potentially hostile and foreboding silences which frequently denote the forces of evil gaining the upper hand. In this case, the acoustic space is mapped out and recognisable to the given character; it can be said to be awakened and put in motion by the sound which shapes it with a renewed touch of recognition. Importantly, this rejuvenated acoustic space holds nothing of the indeterminate sense of infinity which routinely accompanies the intrusive, overwhelming presence of silence.

Yet, for this very reason, this mechanism can become an instrument of echolocation, exposing the character's own spatial position in a hostile environment. Because echo has a way of exposing the full layout of space to the listener, just as light behaves in visual space, it can occasionally produce an unwanted result.

Echo is used to evoke sinister connotations in the memorable episode when Pippin throws a stone into the well of the guardroom in the mines of Moria:

A chill air seemed to strike his face, rising from invisible depths. Moved by a sudden impulse he groped for a loose stone, and let it drop. He felt his

heart beat many times before there was any sound. Then far below, as if the stone had fallen into deep water in some cavernous place, there came a *plunk*, very distant, but magnified and repeated in the hollow shaft.

The Fellowship of the Ring, 408

It is important to note all the symbolic dimensions in the passage: what Pippin wakes by his ill-advised feat of curiosity are echoes of the past, as his action almost triggers the re-enactment of the last stand in Moria. The passage also uses the concept of echo as an instrument linking the past and future into a single linear sequence.

It is against this context that passages describing echo in a positive way reveal their significance. Echo is an invariably positive occurrence when it is linked with the motif of trumpets or horns. This may not seem surprising, but, as for many other motifs in Tolkien's work, its symbolism is put to effective use. Apart from being a commonly used means of military communication, trumpets are also the most effective tool for disseminating sound in wide expanses of space in Tolkien's secondary world.

Thus, at some of the most significant junctures of the story, the motif of blowing the horn is woven into the core reality of the unveiling events. We hear echo answering the horn summoning the Dead Men of Dunharrow to their final battle,

Then Elrohir gave to Aragorn a silver horn, and he blew upon it; and it seemed to those that stood near that they heard a sound of answering horns, as if it was an echo in deep caves far away. No other sound they heard, and yet they were aware of a great host gathered all about the hill on which they stood; and a chill wind like the breath of ghosts came down from the mountains.

The Return of the King, 1033

The significance of the echo is made all the more powerful when we juxtapose the above passage with the unfortunate incident in Moria. In both cases, the function of the echo is to wake ghosts of the past, but this time the deed is done with full premeditation and foresight by someone able to control the potentially hostile forces he rouses. Thus, in the latter example echo becomes an important symbol in the vindication of the tragedy of the historical past by the heroic present.

A corresponding aural perspective accompanies the arrival of Forlong the Fat, Lord of Lossarnach, at the beleaguered Gondor, King Theoden arriving at Harrowdale and the Rohirrim riding to the Battle of Pelennor Fields:

Horns sounded at some distance, and the noise of cheering rolled towards them like a gathering wind. Then there was a loud trumpet-blast, and all about them people were shouting.

The Return of the King, 1008

Then one blew a long call on a horn. It echoed in the valley. Other horns answered it, and lights shone out across the river.

And suddenly there rose a great chorus of trumpets from high above, sounding from some hollow place, as it seemed, that gathered their notes into one voice and sent it rolling and beating on the walls of stone.

The Return of the King, 1038

And as if in answer there came from far away another note. Horns, horns, horns. In dark Mindolluin's sides they dimly echoed. Great horns of the North wildly blowing. Rohan had come at last.

The Return of the King, 1085

Most memorably, perhaps, the motif is featured in the scene of the death of Boromir:

Then suddenly with a deep-throated call a great horn blew, and the blasts of it smote the hills and echoed in the hollows, rising in a mighty shout above the roaring of the falls.

The Two Towers, 537

None of this is sufficient to explain the sense of grandeur on which the dramatic aura of the above passages depends. The full significance of the phenomenon of the echo goes beyond the narrative technique; it is found in the deep mythical texture of Tolkien's secondary world. As in all worlds where the sensory reality conceals the spiritual reality where mythical instances determine the Providential design immanent in the unveiling history, we are aware that individual choices and the seemingly inescapable meanders of history are emanations of patterns set in motion on a higher, overriding level of reality – that they are, in effect, echoes. In *The Silmarillion*,

the idea of the echo is one of the fundamental metaphors; we learn that the world of Arda itself is an echo of the Music of the Ainur, while of the music of Ulmo we read that “the echo of that music runs through all the veins of the world in sorrow and in joy” (*The Silmarillion*, 35).

Thus the concept of the echo embodies the temporal relation of the mythical reality to the joyful or tragic events taking place in the reality which has separated itself from it:

Then Morgoth sent forth a terrible cry, that echoed in the mountains. Therefore that region was called Lammoth; for the echoes of his voice dwelt there ever after, so that any who cried aloud in that land awoke them, and all the waste between the hills and the sea was filled with a clamour as of voices in anguish.

The Silmarillion, 93

It is no accident that the hosts of the Noldor, led back to Middle-earth by Fëanor, land in the wasteland of Lammoth, or the Great Echo. Once again we need to illustrate a fundamental feature of Tolkien’s style, method and philosophy by referring to the tales of the First Age, where the closeness and relationship with the mythical reality of the beginnings of time make certain fundamentals of the subcreated reality more apparent. Thus in *Narn I Hîn Húrin*, or *The Tale of the Children of Húrin*, we read how Húrin, while staying with the company of outlaws, reminiscences of the time spent at the court of King Thingol:

Against his will he remembered the Hidden Kingdom, and he seemed to hear the names of the flowers of Doriath as echoes of an old tongue almost forgotten.

The Children of Húrin (Unfinished Tales), 87

Subsequently, in the same narrative we read of Niënor’s trauma-induced amnesia:

For behind her lay only an empty darkness, through which came no memory of anything she had ever known, nor any echo of any word.

The Children of Húrin (Unfinished Tales), 121

Thus we see that, for Tolkien, the concept of the echo is an underlying metaphor for the transmission of knowledge, memory and sensation through time. The concept stems from the acoustic relationship between entities separated in space, where the progressively unveiling temporary relationship links the separate items into a single whole. In its deeper, more symbolic meaning it remains an acoustic relationship because the link with the past is invariably created by means of speech and language. The fact that the echo is the fundamental metaphor which defines the relationship of the subcreated reality to its historical, heroic past and the mythical patterns determining its spirituality is explored in the Third Age reality of *The Lord of the Rings*. Here it functions in a wide semantic range and is used to describe the individual mental process of remembering and recalling:

It fell upon his ears like the echo of all the joys he had ever known.

The Return of the King, 1246

Furthermore, it is used in reference to the communal transmission of the heroic stories from the mythical past:

It was like the echo of some forgotten battle in the Dark Years long ago.

The Return of the King, 1146

This second function becomes more important in the course of Tolkien's epic, turning into a vital element of how communal memory is presented. This comes up in Aragorn's comments following his rendition of the story of Beren and Lúthien, and again in the words of Legolas ending his retelling of the story of Nimrodel:

'That is a song,' he said, 'in the mode that is called *ann-thennath* among the Elves, but is hard to render in our Common Speech, and this is but a rough echo of it.

The Fellowship of the Ring, 252

But in the spring when the wind is in the new leaves the echo of her voice may still be heard by the falls that bear her name.

The Fellowship of the Ring, 444

All this provides a perspective for the instances when blowing a horn or trumpet rouses an echo from the surrounding environment. In Tolkien's world, the echo of the horn brings the condensed weight of the heroic past into the specific dramatic moment of the story which goes beyond the immediate context of the passage, and it takes a closer look at the mechanism revealing the depth of its philosophy and thoughtfulness of its design.

To recap, Tolkien's relationship with medieval heritage never operates on the level of an overt intertextuality, metatextual paraphrases or pastiche-like imitation. Instead, the old tradition surrenders itself to the stylistic conventions of modern prose while seeking ways in which the unity of sentiment or timeless power of an idea make their presence felt again in a new configuration and a new context of genre or mode. In this way Tolkien's work anchors itself in the concept of being an echo of the past. His writing is distinct from the old model of seeing and hearing things while acknowledging the past as an element in the formation of one's contemporary identity.

III. Sound and Acoustic Space in the Work of George R. R. Martin

It is an inescapable consequence of the fundamental differences between the secondary worlds created by J. R. R. Tolkien and George R. R. Martin that we are forced to relate our discussion of any finer points of literary composition to the underlying essential characteristics which determine the specific nature of each of the respective sub-creations. Thus, in the case of Tolkien, we related the principles defining the nature of the aural experience encountered in the fictional world of *Ēa* to the notion of sound being an emanation of the harmony that underscored the cosmogonic myth of Tolkien's sub-created reality. In contrast, in Martin's fictional universe we encounter no similar mythical hierophany which would permeate the time and space of the narrative present. Instead, at the mythical beginning of time in *A Song of Ice and Fire* we find a philosophy whereby the gradually emerging progress of time and history is not an emanation of the splendour of a divine *logos* manifested at the very beginning,

but rather history rises to the full scope of the heroic myth only as a result of a desperate struggle of the sapient races against the inimical universe.

Consequently, while the symbolic markers of the narrative reality – such as light and darkness or sound and silence – are compatible with the Tolkienian model, we note that the positive quality inherent in the concept of light, as of sound, is not an echo of the cosmic harmony of the mythical beginning of time but an achievement of the uniquely human drive to carve out a space against the hostile world seeking to overwhelm any human endeavour. Thus, the comfort of light and sound is more reminiscent of the comfort of an Anglo-Saxon mead-hall lost in the darkness and silence of the surrounding wilderness: it has more of the immediacy of physical familiarity and contact, it is less universal and more intimately human.

Yet, for all that, the overwhelming silence of the natural environment is not subject to the arbitrary negativity found in Tolkien, since here it is not bound to any universal polarity of good and evil. As mentioned previously, the absence of an absolute value system bound to an overt presence of the sacred and the multiplicity of narratives results in a model of reality where bipolarity is not automatically defined in ethical terms. Consequently, silence is not an agent of evil here; it is merely an element of Nature – a state of balance which leaves no room for the presence of human civilisation. This is because it is the inherent expansiveness of humanity that brings instability which is so opposed to the impartial, impersonal poise of Nature.

As such, the overwhelming variety of sound that is the product and natural condition of human society is merely a speck on the inarticulate silence of Nature which surrounds it. Unlike in Tolkien, the silence of the natural environment in Martin's epic story is not an invasive presence endowed with an evil, destructive intent, always seeking to bear down upon every endeavour. Instead, silence represents the indefatigable vitality of Nature which recedes whenever it is encroached upon by human civilisation; it also never tires of reasserting its presence when that civilisation wavers for any reason:

Elsewise all was dark and silent.

A Dance with Dragons, 1203

Beyond, the haunted forest waited, dark and silent

A Dance with Dragons, 847

They were riding through a gloomy wood, a dank, dark, silent place where the pines pressed close.

A Feast for Crows, 496

The black brothers had left Castle Black in good spirits, joking and trading tales, but of late the brooding silence of the wood seemed to have sombered them all.

II.132

After a while, the sound of Robb's laughter receded, and the woods grew silent again.

A Game of Thrones, 22

Indeed, throughout *A Song of Ice and Fire*, the adjectives "silent" and "dark" are paired frequently enough for the emergent expression to become a standard collocation. As such it is used to describe situations when human-occupied space is transformed, through periods of disuse, back into indifferently mute surroundings:

The armory was dark and silent.

A Dance with Dragons, 250

By midnight, the castle was silent and dark.

A Clash of Kings, 254

They were riding through a gloomy wood, a dank, dark, silent place where the pines pressed close.

A Feast for Crows, 496

Castle Black was still and silent, its halls and towers dark.

A Dance with Dragons, 626

It becomes the measure of the destruction and fragmentation of human society in the wake of the bitter war in Westeros that silence and darkness are able to ooze through, and lay a claim on, the physical distance between individual people. This happens, for

instance, during the harsh moments marking the defence of the Wall by the Night's Watch against the various races and powers inhabiting the lands of the extreme North laying beyond it:

Up top, the sentries would be huddling in the warming shed around a brazier, shouting to be heard above the wind. Or else they would have given up the effort, and each man would be sunk in his own pool of silence.

A Dance with Dragons, 248

In this particular scene it is paradoxically the intense sound of the wind which brings a form of silence upon the sentries guarding the Wall, although it is more about the mental perception of solitude and separation than any objective aural sensation. This is a reminder of the fact that, in Martin's character-focalised narrative, the acoustic interaction between human society and the world of Nature is marked by an element of subjectivity, making individual character's cognition the ultimate measure of any aural experience.

It should be noted at this point that although silence is not in itself a threatening presence in Martin's world, the mere association of the phenomenon with absence, neglect and decay makes it reminiscent of death:

Jon had seen an abandoned holdfast once, a drear place where nothing moved but the wind and the stones kept silent about whatever people had lived there.

A Game of Thrones, 58

When the distant cheers had faded to silence and the yard was empty at last, Winterfell seemed deserted and dead.

A Game of Thrones, 536

The fighting was over, and the silence of the grave had settled over the Red Keep.

A Game of Thrones, 502

Snowflakes swirled from a dark sky and ashes rose to meet them, the grey and the white whirling around each other as flaming arrows arced above a wooden wall and dead things shambled silent through the cold,

A Dance with Dragons, 673

Asha could see the beacon fire burning atop the watchtower, a faint orange glow floating in the air. Elsewhere the village was gone. She was alone in a white world of snow and silence, plowing through snowdrifts as high as her thighs.

A Dance with Dragons, 1342

The recurring reference to silence as an important element in the imagery of the lingering remnants of war and destruction makes silence a symbolic semantic coordinate which conjures up an automatic sense of premonition:

For a moment Eddard Stark was filled with a terrible sense of foreboding. *This* was his place, here in the north. He looked at the stone figures all around them, breathed deep in the chill silence of the crypt. He could feel the eyes of the dead.

A Game of Thrones, 52

Eddard Stark said a silent farewell to the home he loved.

A Game of Thrones, 66.

Given all this, it comes as no surprise that the most emphatic and persistent references to silence are used in *A Song of Ice and Fire* in reference to the Others:

The Other slid forward on silent feet

A Game of Thrones, 17

They emerged silently from the shadows,

A Game of Thrones, 18

Behind him, to right, to left, all around him, the watchers stood patient, faceless, silent, the shifting patterns of their delicate armor making them all but invisible in the wood. Yet they made no move to interfere.

A Game of Thrones, 18

And the Others smelled the hot blood in him, and came silent on his trail,

A Game of Thrones, 239

Swords rose and fell, all in a deathly silence.

A Game of Thrones, 19

Again, once a firm semantic association is installed within the narrative through repetitive use in the dramatic scenes of the Prologue to *A Game of Thrones*, a mere reference to silence is enough to bring out the sinister weight inherent in the textual link to evoke a sense of impending threat, as happens in the account of the ill-fated Night's Watch expedition beyond the Wall described in *A Storm of Swords*:

"The wood's too silent," the old forester was saying. "No frogs near that river, no owls in the dark. I never heard no deader wood than this."

A Storm of Swords, I, 10

Off to the left and right, half-seen through the silent trees, torches turned to vague orange haloes in the falling snow. When he turned his head he could see them, slipping silent through the wood, bobbing up and down and back and forth. The Old Bear's ring of fire, he reminded himself, and woe to him who leaves it.

A Storm of Swords, I, 166

Another group of characters whose identity depends on the link between silence the expanses of death which stretch beyond the human realm are the Silent Sisters. The female order, formed within the religion of the Seven for the specific task of burial preparation and all rites associated with it, falls under the spiritual jurisdiction of the Stranger. The aura surrounding members of the order is largely defined by their vow of silence bringing them closer to the boundary which separates the living and the dead:

The silent sisters do not speak to the living, Catelyn remembered dully, but some say they can talk to the dead.

A Clash of Kings, 357

It is important not to lose sight of the fact that, for all the similarities in the associations stirred by the concept of silence, different characters relate differently to the notion of silence. In case of the Others, the silence surrounding them marks them out as being outside the cognitive familiarity of humankind. The nature of the Others means they represent hostility of active will to inflict harm

which resides beyond Nature, which, as mentioned above, does not have this quality. Thus, as the Others are more at home in the world of Nature, they partake of its qualities and attributes while remaining distinct because the hostility they represent is a moral choice of a sapient mind. Hence the relationship of the Others with Nature seems more parasitic than symbiotic.

Conversely, the Silent Sisters' domain extends as far as human spirituality reaches beyond the circle of life; their mute status is essentially an expression of respect and humility, which is significant in a faith with no clearly developed concept of afterlife. Thus, collectively, the Others and the Silent Sisters represent two extremities of silence.

There is another distinctive type of characters who are invariably referred as silent: direwolves. This may not seem surprising given the animals' natural penchant for soundless motion and their symbiotic relationship with the natural environment; however, it is important that, as their relationship with the Stark children is generally positive, the direwolves serve as a vital link between the human world and the silent world of Nature:

The silent presence of the direwolf gave him comfort.

A Game of Thrones, 520

It is the depiction of the "skin-changing" experience periodically undergone by the beasts' young owners which establishes a certain reciprocity between the two opposing worlds, bringing out a new quality where the subjectivity of acoustic sensation is a crucial element of this relationship:

As he slipped inside Summer's skin, the dead woods came to sudden life. Where before there had been silence, now he heard: wind in the trees, Hodor's breathing, the elk pawing at the ground in search of fodder.

A Dance with Dragons, 119

As noted indicated earlier, in this internally-focalised narrative the gap in the experience of the aural sensation between humans and most other the species inhabiting the natural world is a vital factor in the breach between the two environments. It becomes apparent that the sensation of silence which the characters experience in their

relation to the natural world may be because the aural experience cannot be transmitted effectively. This in itself separates the fictional reality of *A Song of Ice and Fire* from the more objective narrative of Tolkien's fiction. Here we find no common denominator which would relate the human to the natural world in a cognitive, spiritual or ethical sense. For one thing, Nature seems intrinsically ill-prepared and disposed for coming into contact with the human world; the gap in sensory perception is in itself wide enough. In addition, Nature has no articulable sensitivity to some of the core experiences of life, such as those relating to death and suffering. It is indeed the stark quality of Nature's indifference to these phenomena, its inability to manifest pity or grief in terms recognisable to the human mind, as well as its impersonal, detached awareness born out of a distinct perception of time, that is the source of the dread that it routinely evokes in humans. It is also the reason for its association with the experience of death itself. Similarly, there is no unifying spiritual context which would bind the divergent elements of Creation into a single organism.

The acoustic relationship between the world of Nature and the world defined by the artificial edifice of human culture is therefore a complex one. Silence experienced by the characters may not always be the objective state of their environment, even though it is frequently experienced as such by most humans. This complexity comes across vividly in the motif of the godswood:

The gods of Winterfell kept a different sort of wood. It was a dark, primal place, three acres of old forest untouched for ten thousand years as the gloomy castle rose around it. It smelled of moist earth and decay. No redwoods grew here. This was a wood of stubborn sentinel trees armored in grey-green needles, of mighty oaks, of ironwoods as old as the realm itself. Here thick black trunks crowded close together while twisted branches wove a dense canopy overhead and misshapen roots wrestled beneath the soil. This was a place of deep silence and brooding shadows, and the gods who lived here had no names.

A Game of Thrones, 29

The godswoods are uniquely positioned, being an integral part of the natural world which comes into the deepest, most symbiotic contact with the human world. The local, evolutionary spirituality,

which is the defining characteristic of the godswood, has evidently developed outside of human society, yet its relationship with human civilisation brings an extra-temporal awareness which appears to be an indispensable element maintaining the integrity of human culture; this is clearest at times of major historical upheaval. Such a symbiosis is possible precisely because the natural perception and sensibility of the godswood is so distinct from human cognition; moreover, it is the human species that is the junior partner always positioned at the receiving end of this cooperative arrangement.

Now, what all of this entails for the aural layout of Martin's fictional world is that the godswood's distinctive character means its acoustic space is, in a sense, cut off from its surroundings to become a self-contained and self-sufficient enclave of silence, surrounded on all sides by the environment of the castle which abounds with the sound of human life.

This fragmentation of the acoustic space is undoubtedly the result of the fragmentation of the spiritual level in *A Song of Ice and Fire*. Thus, unlike in Tolkien, silence in Martin can become a local phenomenon which does not enter into a relationship with the sound it coexists with; rather, the two exist side by side, with the overall picture becoming more like a mosaic than an interrelated pattern as was the case in Tolkien.

What is most important, however, is that the resulting overall pattern corresponds in an intricate way to medieval spatial perception, since the silence of the gods is presented as a local phenomenon which depends on a specific element of the imagery. In other words, the aural space filled with silence is created by the presence of the godswood. Thus the silence of the godswood and the noisy environment of the castle become adjacent elements which together form the acoustic space by filling it. Consequently, if we include forests surrounding Winterfell, more acoustic space would be created by the silence produced by these forests. The different flavour of this silence would be the result of the different makeup of the forests, perhaps containing redwoods.

Thus, whereas in Tolkien silence mainly indicates a hostile presence impinging upon the expanses of emptiness and can become an ever-expanding active agent extending into infinite distance, in

Martin silence is generally a finite, solid block of acoustic space inextricably bound to a constituent element of the spatial layout:

Bran could perch for hours among the shapeless, rain-worn gargoyles that brooded over the First Keep, watching it all: the men drilling with wood and steel in the yard, the cooks tending their vegetables in the glass garden, restless dogs running back and forth in the kennels, the silence of the godswood, the girls gossiping beside the washing well.

A Game of Thrones, 81

This does not mean that silence in Martin cannot occasionally become an obstructive, imposing presence bearing upon a character with a suffocating weight of hostility. This happens to Theon Greyjoy during his brief heyday as lord of Winterfell:

Theon started back to bed. He'd roll Kyra on her back and fuck her again, that ought to banish these phantoms. Her gasps and giggles would make a welcome respite from this silence.

A Clash of Kings, 446

Come dawn, he dressed and went outside, to walk along the outer walls. A brisk autumn wind was swirling through the battlements. It reddened his cheeks and stung his eyes. He watched the forest go from grey to green below him as light filtered through the silent trees. On his left he could see tower tops above the inner wall, their roofs gilded by the rising sun. The red leaves of the weirwood were a blaze of flame among the green. Ned Stark's tree, he thought, and Stark's wood, Stark's castle, Stark's sword, Stark's gods. This is their place, not mine. I am a Greyjoy of Pyke, born to paint a kraken on my shield and sail the great salt sea. I should have gone with Asha.

A Clash of Kings, 502

Thus the self-contained silence of the godswood does not always entail an absence of contact, and the above passages illustrate the extent of the symbiotic nature of sound and silence in *A Song of Ice and Fire*. The intrusion of silence upon the unfortunate usurper is not the result of a human-like volitional act, but of the balance of silence and sound between the godswood and the castle being undermined as the latter starts to generate its own tragic kind of silence due to the privations and adversities of wartime.

However, it is prudent to balance the scenes above with a picture of the godswood's relation to the human environment from before the North of Westeros endured the tragedies and defeats of war. As shown by the post-traumatic experiences of Bran Stark, the silence of the godswood can also provide a soothing sensation of calm and familiarity:

The gods were looking over him, he told himself; the old gods, gods of the Starks and the First Men and the children of the forest, his *father's* gods. He felt safe in their sight, and the deep silence of the trees helped him think.

A Game of Thrones, 529

The important thing here is that the passage confirms the naturally static, limited character of silence of the godswood, which only extends its comfort when it is accessed within its resident space. In its normal state, this kind of silence cannot be exported or extended beyond its natural spatial boundaries – it fills the acoustic space of the godswood in the same way in which the godswood fills the visual space in the imagery.

Thus, silence does not always mean an absence of contact; instead, its specific nature makes the relationship reminiscent of the precarious tenacity of alien contact in Stanisław Lem's *Solaris*. There is an indication of this at an early stage in the narrative during the scene when Catelyn Stark brings the fateful news of the king's intention to visit to her husband meditating in the godswood:

Catelyn found her husband beneath the weirwood, seated on a moss-covered stone. The greatsword Ice was across his lap, and he was cleaning the blade in those waters black as night. A thousand years of humus lay thick upon the godswood floor, swallowing the sound of her feet, but the red eyes of the weirwood seemed to follow her as she came.

A Game of Thrones, 30

The acoustic sensation of the weirwood actively investing the scene with an aura of silence is combined with a visual manifestation of the natural environment witnessing the scene. It is important that we should assume that there exists a human factor at the receiving end of this attention; however, from the point of view of the imagery

of the passages set in the weirwood it is important that any further perception of the scene is driven by the natural quality of the trees, and any active involvement is also enacted by them.

In light of all the above it comes as no surprise that the entire natural world of *A Song of Ice and Fire* cannot be seen as a monolithic creation:

I cannot go home, she thought, but I dare not stay here much longer. The quiet of the woods unnerved her. Asha had spent her life on islands and on ships. The sea was never silent. The sound of the waves washing against a rocky shore was in her blood, but there were no waves at Deepwood Motte ... only the trees, the endless trees, soldier pines and sentinels, beech and ash and ancient oaks, chestnut trees and ironwoods and firs. The sound they made was softer than the sea, and she heard it only when the wind was blowing; then the sighing seemed to come from all around her, as if the trees were whispering to one another in some language that she could not understand.

A Dance with Dragons, 560

As we can see from Asha Greyjoy's insightful self-reflection, the universal design of the acoustic space in Martin's world is made up of a mosaic of adjacent concentric component aural spaces which are specific to the regions, climates or presence of natural elements in myriad locations. Each of these aural enclaves brings in its own uniqueness which come together to form the natural world.

The passage also reveals the degree to which a character's native acoustic environment becomes a part of their identity; the natural environment plays an important role in shaping a character's consciousness. This gives an air of objectivity to Asha's feeling of rejection by the environment; although the feeling could be a psychological projection of her precarious status on the mainland where she is marooned at Deepwood Motte, it stems from an objective unease of the acoustic specificity of an unfamiliar environment.

In terms of the general acoustic incompatibility between different kinds of natural environment, there is an obvious common denominator for the intense sense of rejection experienced by Theon and the hostility which Asha is acutely aware of, since both stem from the Greyjoys' role in the narrative at this point as the invaders

of the North. However, there are also differences. Asha experiences the sound of a regular forest, which creates an expulsive barrier for her. In turn, the invasive silence of the weirwood obsessively bearing down on Theon is particularly oppressive since he is not used to the typical sound of the northern forests. This confirms that since types of aural experience are bound to specific environments, the incompatibility between them manifests in a range of ways. We can also see that the weirwood's acoustic strategy for dealing with humans is more attuned to the specificity of human perception and more endowed with a sense of presence.

This leads us to consider the more precise mechanisms by means of which sound and silence relate to each other in the sections of the sub-created world which are transformed and defined by human civilisation. As already shown, the presence of sound is the chief characteristic which marks out human space from nominally silent expanses of the natural world. This means the human world is replete with sound whose constant presence seems to almost uphold the human nature of social spaces. The soundscape of the human world is hence characterised by the acoustic space being filled with concentrically expanding sounds of social life:

At ground level the Great Pyramid of Meereen was a hushed place, full of dust and shadows. Its outer walls were thirty feet thick. Within them, sounds echoed off arches of many-colored bricks, and amongst the stables, stalls, and storerooms.

A Dance with Dragons, 268

On the terrace, a few flies stirred sluggishly. A bird began to chirp in the persimmon tree, and then two more. Dany cocked her head to hear their song, but it was not long before the sounds of the waking city drowned them out.

The sounds of my city.

A Feast for Crows, 673

Tyrion glanced at the door, where a man had just come in: tall and stooped, his pointed beard dyed a splotchy purple. Some Tyroshi trader. A gust of sound came with him from outside; the cries of gulls, a woman's laughter, the voices of the fishmongers.

A Dance with Dragons, 601

In the last excerpt, the defining feature of the characters' perception of human sound is its dynamic, active character. The sound of the human world is always on the move and the characters' attention invariably catches it in the process of travelling across the acoustic space, as though constantly re-creating it by the movement the sound undertakes. The dynamic movement of sound creates an echo which maps out the acoustic space in a specific scene:

The sound echoed queerly from the corners of the room and twisted like a worm inside their ears.

A Dance with Dragons, 689

Jaime's head jerked round at the sound of a distant roar, faint but ferocious. It echoed off the walls of Harrenhal, and the laughter swelled up like the sea.

A Feast for Crows, 422

We have already seen the motif of the echo playing a similar role in Tolkien's prose; however, while for him echo is a progressive phenomenon in its underlying mechanism, in Martin's writing its expansive character is more prominent. Thus, in Martin, echo does not roll over the imagery taking over the acoustic space from the otherwise persistently creeping silence; instead, it pushes silence outside of an enclave of concentric space marked as the space of human habitation with the continuous reverberation of sound separating it from the adjacent silent world of Nature. Nowhere is this clearer than in the passage describing the sudden change in the aural perspective experienced by Arya after Harrenhal is suddenly emptied in the wake of Lord Tywin's march against the army of the North:

Away from the gates and the stables, the great castle was largely deserted. The noise dwindled behind her. A swirling wind gusted, drawing a high shivery scream from the cracks in the Wailing Tower. Leaves had begun to fall from the trees in the godswood, and she could hear them moving through the deserted courtyards and between the empty buildings, making a faint skittery sound as the wind drove them across the stones. Now that Harrenhal was near empty once again, sound did queer things here. Sometimes the stones seemed to drink up noise, shrouding the yards in a blanket of silence. Other times, the echoes had a life of their own, so

every footfall became the tread of a ghostly army, and every distant voice a ghostly feast. The funny sounds were one of the things that bothered Hot Pie, but not Arya.

A Clash of Kings, 420

It feels as though the shock of silence suddenly descending upon the enormous castle causes an array of sound anomalies, as the human acoustic space and that of the natural world seek to realign themselves around this new situation. Harrenhal becomes a unique boundary place where the two worlds meet and intertwine with one other in an attempt to re-establish a balance of coexistence. This is why the godswood is heard groping around, having been stirred by the sudden silence coming from the neighbouring realm of the human social space. This is also the reason for silence taking over the empty space of the castle, and the echo's attempt to retrace the contours of this new acoustic environment.

The entire experience is directly related to the ongoing process of sensory readjustment to the new aural environment as experienced by the focalising character, as sounds which were previously swallowed by the continuous commotion of the castle population gradually reveal themselves. The experiences of other characters sharing the sensation lend a certain aura of objectivity to the situation which develops in accordance with aural phenomena function in Martin's world; in this sense what Arya experiences is a sudden collision of two distinct acoustic environments.

Another important element in the passage is the function of the echo in relation to another acoustic realm characterised by silence, i.e. the world of the dead. The connection between echo and death explored extensively in *A Song of Ice and Fire*; while to some extent it may be related to the idea of looking for continuity between the past and the present, it is markedly different to the link as described in Tolkien. Here the echo does not take us back to the great splendour of mythical time, but instead it places extra emphasis on the destruction and decay and expresses a sense of wistful melancholy at the transient nature of all human endeavour.

This is also clear during Brienne and Podrick's fated journey to the Whispers, a ruined castle of House Crabb on Crackclaw Point

situated on the edge of a cliff overlooking the narrow sea between Westeros and Essos. As the gruesome legend concerning the place is explicated by the company's suspicious guide Nimble Dick, the unique soundscape of the place is shrouded in a supernatural aura before the characters have any chance to confront the experience:

Beyond was sky and sea... and an ancient, tumbledown castle, abandoned and overgrown on the edge of a cliff. "The Whispers," said Nimble Dick. "Have a listen. You can hear the heads."

Podrick's mouth gaped open. "I hear them."

Brienne heard them too. A faint, soft murmuring that seemed to be coming from the ground as much as from the castle. The sound grew louder as she neared the cliffs. It was the sea, she realized suddenly. The waves had eaten holes in the cliffs below and were rumbling through caves and tunnels beneath the earth. "There are no heads," she said. "It's the waves you hear whispering."

"Waves don't whisper. It's heads."

A Feast for Crows, 229

As Brienne soon convinces herself, the legend attributing the unique sonic effect to the whispering of the heads cut off by the lord of the castle and brought back to life by his witch-wife is nothing more than a simple folk explanation of a perfectly natural phenomenon. Yet being able to rationalise away the nature of the experience does not prevent Brienne from falling under the uneasy spell of the atmosphere of the place. We see how Brienne's ample capacity for soul searching and retrospection leaves her open to doubt and dejection; her precarious mental state makes her prone to finding more meaning in the natural phenomenon. This allows Martin's universal association of echo with death to overwhelm Brienne's otherwise practical mind:

What was she waiting for? Brienne told herself that she was being foolish. The sound was just the sea, echoing endlessly through the caverns beneath the castle, rising and falling with each wave. It did sound like whispering, though, and for a moment she could almost see the heads, sitting on their shelves and muttering to one another.

A Feast for Crows, 231

The reason it appears so easy to succumb to the legend's darker charm is the fact that it stems directly from the acoustic propensities of the place. Just like the monstrous castle of Harrenhal, the Whispers is a boundary place where two different worlds have coexisted as two distinct sonic environments occupying adjacent acoustic space. The subsequent decay which befell the human environment of the castle left the naturally more vibrant domain of the sea constantly groping for the newly-found sonic emptiness of the ruined edifice. The unnatural character of the sound thus produced is as much the result of the specific acoustic features of the natural terrain and the sea slowly eating into the cliff as it is caused by the state of the destroyed buildings. In other words, it is largely the direct result of the transient nature of human endeavour. While in Harrenhal, and before that in Winterfell, it was the silence of the surrounding space seeking to adjust to the sudden emptiness of the human-occupied environment, now it is the incessant resonance of the sea stirring the dead silence of the castle into making a sound; this is not a natural feature of either acoustic environment but it is the result of the decay of the human environment.

Once again, the link between the aural experience and the notion of death is made through the concept of echoing sound; this motif is exploited throughout *A Song of Ice and Fire* making important contributions to a number of significant passages:

The echoes rang through the darkness, and all around them the dead of Winterfell seemed to watch with cold and disapproving eyes.

A Game of Thrones, 51

Promise me, Ned, Lyanna's voice echoed.

A Game of Thrones, 466

The sound echoed through the transepts and crypts and chapels, as if the dead interred within the walls were laughing too.

A Feast for Crows, 97

Arguably, the crucial moment employing the notion of echo is the description of the Red Wedding. Here the introduction of the echo in

the description of the music performed from the galleries of the main hall at the castle at the Twins is used as the first indication of the atmosphere of the narrative, as articulated through Catelyn Stark, shifting from merely uncomfortable to downright sinister:

The drums were pounding, pounding, pounding, and her head with them. Pipes wailed and flutes trilled from the musicians' gallery at the foot of the hall; fiddles screeched, horns blew, the skins skirled a lively tune, but the drumming drove them all. The sounds echoed off the rafters, whilst the guests ate, drank, and shouted at one another below.

A Storm of Swords, I, 474

Thus, before the visual imagery catches up on the tone of the passage, the intensification of the echo is the chief indicator of the impending doom:

The music drowned all other sound, echoing off the walls as if the stones themselves were playing.

A Storm of Swords, I, 479

Interestingly, the same sound focalised at the same moment from the outside by Arya approaching the Twins with Sandor Clegane functions in a different way. It is devoid of the echo produced by the walls of the castle, and its component parts are heard individually mingled with other sounds of the environment:

They heard the music before they saw the castle; the distant rattle of drums, the brazen blare of horns, the thin skirling of pipes faint beneath the growl of the river and the sound of the rain.

A Storm of Swords, I, 470

Somewhere far off she heard a wolf howling. It wasn't very loud compared to the camp noise and the music and the low ominous growl of the river running wild, but she heard it all the same. Only maybe it wasn't her ears that heard it. The sound shivered through Arya like a knife, sharp with rage and grief. More and more riders were emerging from the castle, a column four wide with no end to it, knights and squires and freeriders, torches and longaxes. And there was noise coming from behind as well.

A Storm of Swords, I, 482

Once again, the psychological effect is enacted through sound as Arya struggles to make sense of the unexpected palette of sounds she encounters. The coexisting presence of different kinds of sounds expands the acoustic space, drowning and deconcentrating the focalising character as the changing volume of the sounds in no way corresponds to their significance. The bewilderment, fear and final agony of recognition is mirrored by Arya gradually regaining her mental orientation and control over her environment. In other words, the natural cognitive tendency to focus on the more emphatic, recognisable sound which has a more distinct claim on the listener's acoustic environment becomes sufficiently strong to drive the disorientation. Hence, in isolating the sound of the dying direwolf from the noise of the universal slaughter, Arya has a sensation of going against her natural sense of hearing.

At this point we should consider another derelict castle whose silence is burdened with its own tragic legend from the mythical past: the Nightfort. Being the oldest and largest of the castles once guarding the Wall, the abandoned fortress of the Night's Watch enjoys a special status and significance when it comes to embodying a link between the past and the present.

This status is explored in the course of the narrative: we arrive at the abandoned ruins with Bran and the company to hear the captivating story of the gods punishing a crime against the laws of hospitality just in time for it to serve as a backdrop for the Red Wedding and serve as a prophecy of things to come.

The ruined castle is not essentially different in its relationship with the acoustic environment of the surrounding wilderness from other examples of the edifices of transient human habitation swallowed back by the expanding world of Nature. The aural experience of this borderline type of acoustic space is bolstered by the visual imagery:

The wind made a nervous whistling sound as it shivered through the broken towers, the keeps groaned and settled, and he could hear rats scabbling under the floor of the great hall. The Rat Cook's children running from their father. The yards were small forests where spindly trees rubbed their bare branches together and dead leaves scuttled like roaches across patches of old snow. There were trees growing where the stables had been,

and a twisted white weirwood pushing up through the gaping hole in the roof of the burned kitchen.

A Storm of Swords, II, 199

Arguably the Nightfort represents a more advanced stage of the natural world claiming back its man-usurped heritage. The noises resounding among the ruined buildings are not like the eerie sounds resulting from a sudden change of the familiar acoustic habitat; they are unsettling because they are ordinary sounds of a forest in an environment which still bears distinct traces of having been a human domain. Somewhat paradoxically, it is this discrepancy which causes Bran to mentally transform these ordinary sounds into a ghostly mimicry of sounds he would expect somewhere bearing the trademark of human activity:

Outside the wind was sending armies of dead leaves marching across the courtyards to scratch faintly at the doors and windows. The sounds made him think of Old Nan's stories. He could almost hear the ghostly sentinels calling to each other atop the Wall and winding their ghostly warhorns.

A Storm of Swords, II, 204

We follow the episode of Bran, Meera, Jojen and Hodor spending a night in the Nightfort to observe Martin's narrative developing in a direct intertextual context with the work of Tolkien, and this time the relationship has a direct bearing on the subject of our discussion. Thus the scene when Bran hears a series of unsettling sounds echoing from the bottom of a well located in the kitchens some time after Hodor throws a piece of slate into it clearly references the scene when Pippin throws a stone into the well in the guardsroom in Moria:

Far, far, far below, they heard the sound as the stone found water. It wasn't a splash, not truly. It was more a gulp, as if whatever was below had opened a quivering gelid mouth to swallow Hodor's stone. Faint echoes traveled up the well, and for a moment Bran thought he heard something moving, thrashing about in the water. [...]

Something was coming up from under the ground, coming up out of the dark. Hodor woke it up. He woke it up with that stupid piece of slate, and now it's coming.

A Storm of Swords, II, 203

Although the sounds emanating from the well are a sign of a dead man approaching, as Coldhands indeed accompanies Samwell Tarly, the scene reaches a nearly comic climax as the unlikely identity of the attacker is revealed. While the scene is an example of an anxious mind reading too much into the sounds it hears, the comic effect of the passage rests on the strong underlying connection between the echo and the idea of death. It is important to discern the difference between the one time when the imagined threat dissolves into a meeting of potential friends and the general nature of the Nightfort where the association between certain sounds and a potential threat is almost consciously exploited by the environment in order to protect its integrity and privacy. It appears as though the natural world, on returning to abandoned human habitats, develops an organic link with the human past rather than its present. This is not surprising in a world where special segments of the natural world are the receptacles of the most profound reservoirs of human memory. Hence, what Bran hears should not be treated solely as a product of overactive imagination, but rather as a response to a calculated attempt of the specific environment of the Nightfort to convey the core of its identity to a being whose relation to time is significantly different. This is especially true for a character marked out for a special role within this unique symbiosis.

This brings us to a discussion of how sound functions in dreams. In *A Song of Ice and Fire* the aural sensation experienced during a dream is a significant component of the overall imagery, starting with silence becoming more significant. This is clear in the description of the dream Sansa Stark has shortly after her father's execution and her own internment in the Red Keep (*Game of Thrones*, 678), with the naturally speechless demeanour of Ser Ilyn Payne becoming a major factor in evoking the classic dream-like sensation of eerie dread.

Silence is also an important part of Jon Snow's skin-changing dream which he experiences while travelling across the Skirling Pass with Qhorin Halfhand:

When he closed his eyes, he dreamed of direwolves. [...] His brothers were out there somewhere, and his sister, but he had lost their scent. He sat on his haunches and lifted his head to the darkening sky, and his cry echoed through the forest, a long lonely mournful sound. [...]

The call came from behind him, softer than a whisper, but strong too. Can a shout be silent? He turned his head, searching for his brother, for a glimpse of a lean grey shape moving beneath the trees, but there was nothing, only... A weirwood.

[...]

The weirwood had his brother's face. Had his brother always had three eyes?

Not always, came the silent shout. Not before the crow.

A Clash of Kings, 474

The motif of extra-sensory perception stems directly from the relationship the young Starks have with the direwolves, previously shown in the passage describing Arya witnessing the Red Wedding. Likewise, we have seen how the skin-changing experience opens up a new aural perspective making the human character aware of the hitherto imperceptible sound of the natural world. In this context it is important that, in Jon's dream, silence serves as an indicator of the extra-sensory nature of the answer coming to the echo of the direwolf's desperate cry; while echo automatically binds a sound to its spatial surroundings, the "silent shout" seems to exist free of any spatial dimensions. The resulting clash of acoustic templates serves as an indication of Bran Stark's growing greenseeing powers and his developing relationship with the communal consciousness of the weirwoods; it also positions Bran beyond the natural condition of life. The dream is a good illustration of how the motif of the echo is used to indicate the boundaries of individual life. As the echo maps out the space available for individual sensory cognition, any attempt to extend beyond this natural boundary leads to a collision with a different form of aural experience. This is why the motif of the echo is so closely tied with the idea of marking the boundary between the world of the living and the realm of the dead.

In another sense, echo also has the function of extending sound in time and extending its accessibility to any form of perception which functions within the confines of the worlds of the living. In this sense echo also marks the temporal boundary crossed by sound along its way beyond human aural capacities and experience.

Thus, when the aural experience becomes a part of a memorised image of the past, it is effectively the first to disintegrate; to be "eaten

up” by the silence which is the natural condition of the realm to which the experience now belongs. This is shown clearly in Theon Greyjoy’s dream recalling the welcoming feast for King Robert at Winterfell:

That night he dreamed of the feast Ned Stark had thrown when King Robert came to Winterfell. The hall rang with music and laughter, though the cold winds were rising outside. At first it was all wine and roast meat, and Theon was making japes and eyeing the serving girls and having himself a fine time... until he noticed that the room was growing darker. The music did not seem so jolly then; he heard discords and strange silences, and notes that hung in the air bleeding.

A Clash of Kings, 501

Theon’s dream is clearly a projection of his subconscious uneasiness at the uncanny series of events and upheavals of fortune that led him to become a despotic and whimsical ruler of the burnt-out stub of Winterfell. In another sense, the dream is a premonition of Theon’s own sorry end, and it should not be lost on us that the vision bears a distinct resemblance to the events of the Red Wedding as the increasingly ghastly music marks the progress of the impending cataclysm. In its essence, Theon’s dream is yet another example of human perception stumbling against the impenetrable boundary which separates the living from the silence of the dead. Consequently, Theon’s memory of the music performed during the feast falters and is consumed by silence as the recollection of the sound loses its relation to time and succumbs to the sensation of time standing still. Since human perception does not find it natural to deal with sensations which do not progress in time, it inevitably surrenders its capacities before attempting to cross the cognitive boundaries of the world of the living.

Arguably the most interesting dream in *A Song of Ice and Fire* is Jaime Lannister’s feverish, hallucinatory vision which he experiences on his way to Harrenhal in the company of Vargo Goat and the Brave Companions:

The steps ended abruptly on echoing darkness. Jaime had the sense of vast space before him. He jerked to a halt, teetering on the edge of nothingness. [...] “What place is this?”

“Your place.” The voice echoed; it was a hundred voices, a thousand, the voices of all the Lannisters since Lann the Clever, who’d lived at the dawn of days. But most of all it was his father’s voice, and beside Lord Tywin stood his sister, pale and beautiful, a torch burning in her hand.

A Storm of Swords, I, 418

As Jaime is mentally transported to the underground caverns under his home of Casterly Rock, we find the familiar motifs of echo and darkness which routinely accompany encounters with the dead in Martin’s fictional world. The near delirious Jaime achieves a level of eerie intimacy with the ghosts of the dead in a place which is clearly outside time; some of those he meets were still alive in the world of time, since no hint of silence obstructs their communication at first.

In fact silence only becomes a factor in the second phase of the dream, when Jaime is approached by the ghosts of Lord Eddard Stark and the Knights of the Kingsguard, killed either in the defence of Lyanna at the Tower of Joy or at the Trident, and lastly the apparition of Prince Rhaegar:

The destriers emerged from the blackness at a slow walk. They make no sound, Jaime realized. No splashing, no clink of mail nor clop of hoof. He remembered Eddard Stark, riding the length of Aerys’s throne room wrapped in silence. Only his eyes had spoken; a lord’s eyes, cold and grey and full of judgment.

“Is it you, Stark?” Jaime called. “Come ahead. I never feared you living, I do not fear you dead.” [...]

The shades dismounted from their ghostly horses. When they drew their longswords, it made not a sound.

A Storm of Swords, I, 419-420

It comes as no surprise that Jaime identifies the visitors as ghosts of the dead specifically because they make no sound approaching. This marks a chilling transition, since the last sound Jaime hears are the receding footsteps of Cersei leaving him. When Lord Eddard Stark is visited by much the same company in his feverish dream following the fateful encounter with Jaime when he is left with a broken leg and given the sedative milk of the poppy (*Game of Thrones*,

392-393), the vision unveils in an ordinary sonic environment. The difference is significant because, while the sense of guilt and regret dominates both dreams, Eddard essentially relives a dramatic event from his life whereas Jaime is confronted with the dead paying him a visit in real time.

Since entangling the full symbolic significance of Jaime's dream lies beyond the scope of the current argument, we focus on exploring the function of the aural experience. The shift from echoes of welcoming voices to the silence of judgement and moral indignation marks Jaime's laborious return to the realm of the living from a closer mental and physical encounter with death than any other character in *A Song of Ice and Fire*. Thus, for all the dread it evokes, the silence marks the moment when, in its fight to stay alive, the fatigued mind seeks to determine its shift from the near-death experience of communion with the echoes of the dead to a state when the urge of self-determination makes it cling to its sensory faculties to distance itself from the realm of the dead to have the barrier of silence reassert itself between the two worlds and to remain on the side of the living.

Next, we examine how silence and sound function within the human-dominated social environment. Let us first consider the characteristics contributing to the idea of silence. As we discussed the corresponding issue in Tolkien, we noted that the majority of terms describing silence stemmed from and referred to the environment imposing a certain acoustic atmosphere upon the characters.

In the case of Martin, as we compare a corresponding sample of expressions, we note that the concept of silence is bound more to the idea of human speech and less to the direct impact of the natural environment. Silence so conceived is a phenomenon created as an outcome of any number of speakers sharing the same environment and is a direct result of the general atmosphere thus created. Hence the silence of mutual dislike is qualified as "cold" (*A Feast for Crows*, 286), "deepening" (*A Game of Thrones*, 55), "sullen" (*A Clash of Kings*, 106), "awkward" (*A Game of Thrones*, 95, *A Dance with Dragons*, 1168, *A Storm of Swords*, 409, *A Feast for Crows*, 196), "strained" (*A Storm of Swords*, 485, 727) or "ominous" (*A Game of Thrones*, 584). Otherwise silence may be "thunderous" (*A Feast for Crows*, 62), "profound" (*A Feast for Crows*, 298), "shocked" (*A Storm of Swords*, 340),

“hushed” (*A Game of Thrones*, 710), “eerie” (*A Storm of Swords*, 443), “sudden” (i.e. *A Storm of Swords*, 530), “moody” (*A Storm of Swords*, 48) or “fragrant” (*A Game of Thrones*, 499).

The rich variety of qualifiers which refine the basic concept of silence is far greater than in Tolkien; more importantly, they clearly indicate a differing understanding of the underlying concept. While in Tolkien silence most commonly functions as a feature of the surrounding natural environment, in Martin it becomes a quasi-intelligent echo of human speech or else its emphatic absence. Here, silence does not come from the outside of the human environment; it originates at the core of human relationships and spreads concentrically from that core. Silence is also more dependent on its relationship with human speech and less on the setting of a particular scene. In other words, the focalising characters’ aural sensibilities and actual sensations are more attuned to and affected by the atmosphere created within the natural imagery of the narrative by the human interaction. Hence the terms routinely used to qualify silence refer more to patterns of human speech and behaviour and less to the features of the setting and imagery.

Another important point is that the impact of silence on human interactions makes it relatively more dynamic than was the case in Tolkien; consequently, its characterisation is more reliant on the use of verbs. It is a notable feature of Martin’s narrative style that the interactions in the semi-symbiotic relationship between human speech and actions and the acoustic atmosphere they evoke are conveyed by anthropomorphising aural phenomena such as silence in order to highlight their dependence upon the human factor:

Silence greeted his announcement.

A Dance with Dragons, 520

Silence lingered behind them, till Little Lenwood Tawney took up his fiddle.

A Feast for Crows, 208

A sudden silence descended over the party. The men looked at the antler uneasily, and no one dared to speak.

A Game of Thrones, 25

They walked among the pavilions, each with its banner and its armor hung outside, the silence weighing heavier with every step.

A Game of Thrones, 283

“No.” Sam’s mouth grew tight and hard. “I hated it there.” He scratched Ghost behind the ear, brooding, and Jon let the silence breathe.

A Game of Thrones, 253

Here silence is perceptibly not treated as a stable precondition of the acoustic space whose existence would, in a conceptual sense, predate the appearance of sound. Rather, it is the sound which is regarded as the natural condition of the acoustic environment occupied by the human characters. This is because sound accompanies all human social life. Consequently, silence is also conjured up as a result of human activity, just like any other acoustic stimuli. Therefore verbal constructions make silence into something resembling a living entity shadowing people’s interactions.

This sometimes takes the form of metonymic constructions which bolster the idea that silence is in constant motion:

Suddenly he realized that the table had fallen silent, and they were all looking at him.

A Game of Thrones, 58

Now, because silence is so dependent on the interpersonal aura created by human relationships, it loses its potentially objective status and becomes the function of the aural capabilities of those present in a given scene. In this way, silence becomes more an emotional state of the characters than a feature of their environment which may at a given moment contain sounds which are easily missed if visual stimuli become more important:

A shocked silence fell. Sansa pulled away from Joffrey, but he had a grip on her, and her sleeve ripped. No one even seemed to hear.

A Storm of Swords, I, 269

Silence in Martin may thus be the silence of inattention, of failure on the part of the characters to connect with their acoustic

environment. This is a predictable consequence of the concept of silence being subjective and dependent on psychological factors. However, the dependence of sound and silence on the character's attention is also directly linked with the separation between different acoustic environments. The way the narrator treats the concept of silence highlights the autonomous nature of the human-dominated acoustic space and its predominantly social character. Silence becomes in Martin a domesticated parasite on human society, a parasite which has lost its original affinity for the inimical silence of the world of Nature which extends beyond any purpose of human activity and is never directly an agent in any overtly ethical conflict.

Therefore, unlike in Tolkien, silence has a sinister air; when a character is not speaking, it indicates a veiled threat or a direct act of hostility:

Is this my father's notion of torment? Not hot irons or the rack, but simple silence? That was so very like Doran Martell that Arianne had to laugh.

A Feast for Crows, 467

Melisandre laughed. "It is his silences you should fear, not his words."

A Dance with Dragons, 109 [of Stannis Baratheon]

Bolton's silence was a hundred times more threatening than Vargo Hoat's slobbering malevolence.

A Storm of Swords, I, 290

Perhaps the scene where the element of silence is most poignant is the final confrontation between Jaime Lannister and his father:

Firelight gleamed golden in the stiff whiskers that framed Lord Tywin's face. A vein pulsed in his neck, but he did not speak. And did not speak. And did not speak.

The strained silence went on until it was more than Jaime could endure. "Father..." he began.

"You are not my son." Lord Tywin turned his face away.

A Storm of Swords, I, 581

Here silence functions as a predominantly subjective derivative of the psychological and emotional tension built up in the conversation

which marks one of the most pivotal moments in the whole of the narrative. The growing intensity of the silence is the result of the emotional weight of the situation and it is unattached to the acoustic environment. Thus, as was the case for Doran Martell and his daughter, silence mainly indicates the severing of the relationship between the characters and an absence of positive emotional connection rather than any directly aural sensation. As the social space is marked by the continuous presence of speech, silence will be invariably seen as clearly breaking social bonds between the characters.

However, silence is far more prominent than it would be as a simple element of the natural environment: it conveys subtleties of relationship between the characters. Silence is frequently not just a sign of resentment at betrayal or abuse of trust. It also marks the point of transformation of a relationship between characters which leaves them no further common ground; this is the nature of the tension between lord Tywin and his elder son. All this confirms Tyrion's typically insightful reflection that "A wise man could earn more from silence than from song" (*A Storm of Swords*, 296).

We next look at examples of Martin's characters entering more conscious relationships with the acoustic phenomena of their environment. We will once again refer to Arya's finely tuned aural sensibilities:

Arya would never have a better chance to escape. She could ride off on Craven and take Stranger too. She chewed her lip. Then she led the horses to the stables, and went in after him.

They know him. The silence told her that.

A Storm of Swords, I, 696

The silence which Arya experiences appears to have learned enough about human aural sensibilities as to be able to communicate with the characters. In other words, Arya realises from the hushed atmosphere surrounding her and the Hound upon entering the Crossroads Inn that the loyalist soldiers have recognised Sandor Clegane; she chooses to concentrate on the unusually low level of noise at the inn, caused by the tense atmosphere, and make it the focus of her interpretation of the acoustic space. This interpretation

of the acoustic space is subjective inasmuch as Arya knows the other participants in the scene, which makes her “hear” things others do not notice. Importantly, Arya’s internally focalising perception creates a distinct and autonomous layer of acoustic space sliced out of the variety of the aural impressions possible in this situation. In the context of character-focalisation, this would undermine any attempts to find an objective template of acoustic space in Martin’s narrative. In fact, any objectivity of acoustic phenomena is negotiable since it depends on a number of characters sharing the same aural impressions, which is tied to the degree of their involvement in the given situation. For this reason we accept, with Arya, that the inn is shrouded in silence.

Indeed, it is common in Martin’s narrative for silence to function as a canvas for other acoustic phenomena; crucially, the template is not the objective acoustic background pre-existing within the setting of the narrative. In other words, it is not related to the condition of the environment. Instead, silence is a transient derivative of the interaction between characters, which serves as a background for speech only because it precedes it in the interaction between the characters. We find a at a very early stage in the narrative:

Their lord father regarded Jon thoughtfully. Robb rushed into the silence he left. “I will nurse him myself, Father,” he promised. “I will soak a towel with warm milk, and give him suck from that.” “Me too!” Bran echoed.

A Game of Thrones, 26

Silence typically mimics the emotional interaction between the characters. We see this upon Theon Greyjoy’s return to his homeland:

They kept a steady plodding pace, past a shepherd’s croft and the abandoned workings of a mine. This new, holy Aeron Greyjoy was not much for talk. They rode in a gloom of silence.

A Clash of Kings, 114

Nowhere does this symbiotic relationship between the character and their acoustic surroundings carry more dramatic quality than in the description of Tyrion returning to his chamber to inflict his

revenge upon Shae and his father after he is released from his prison cell in the Red Keep by Jaime:

He edged past gingerly, taking quick steps so as not to burn his boots, the warm cinders crunching softly under his heels. When he found himself in what had once been his bedchamber, he stood a long moment, breathing the silence.

A Storm of Swords, I, 724

The silence which fills Tyrion's chambers is an objective phenomenon, but its nature and function in the scene are defined by its relationship with the central character. It can be described as an acoustic equivalent of air, resembling an empty acoustic canvas – a potential receptacle for sound. However, it becomes the determining factor in defining the atmosphere of the scene because the central, focalising character chooses it as the dominant sensory stimulus corresponding to the emotional tension of the moment. In other words, were Tyrion to enter the chambers in a different frame of mind, focusing on stealth and secrecy, the acoustic image would have focused on the crunching sound of the cinders. As it is, while the reader is given an accurate and objective acoustic context of the scene, silence dominates over sound because of the way the acoustic environment is described. The resulting prominence of particular elements is determined by how they are perceived by the character; their role is to highlight the character's emotional status.

The situation resembles Arya's exploration of the acoustic layout at the Crossroads Inn. The silence is a feature of the acoustic background in the imagery; however, within the context of the character-focalised narrative, it constitutes the most prominent layer of the acoustic space reflecting the character's emotional state, be it Arya's apprehensiveness of Tyrion's desperate rage.

Thus, when we consider the way in which the acoustic space of social interaction functions in Martin's narrative, we see that the basic pattern of interaction between the background acoustic template and the sound phenomena filling is transformed by character-focalisation. As a result, the overall acoustic sensation is determined by how a character perceives one of the layers of acoustic space which

becomes the focus of their attention. As an absence of aural stimuli constitutes one such layer, the distinction between individual sound and the silent template is rendered meaningless.

A telling passage in this context is the description of the feast held during Lord Wyman Manderly's visit to Winterfell to celebrate the harvest festival, which takes place while Bran is nominally in charge at the castle:

Lord Wyman's musicians played bravely and well, but harp and fiddle and horn were soon drowned beneath a tide of talk and laughter, the clash of cup and plate, and the snarling of hounds fighting for table scraps. The singer sang good songs, "Iron Lances" and "The Burning of the Ships" and "The Bear and the Maiden Fair," but only Hodor seemed to be listening. He stood beside the piper, hopping from one foot to the other. The noise swelled to a steady rumbling roar, a great heady stew of sound. Ser Rodrik talked with Maester Luwin above Beth's curly head, while Rickon screamed happily at the Walders.

A Clash of Kings, 204

Here we see a classic example of the rich texture of the human-dominated social space filled by myriad images and sounds, marking a distinction between the living space of Westeros' latest occupants and the environment surrounding it. The chapter is focalised by Bran Stark; however, on the basis of just the passage quoted above, one would be forgiven for thinking that the point of view is external to the story. This is because the third-person narrator uses Bran's perception as it shifts between different sections of Winterfell's Great Hall to create a three-dimensional aural model of the feast. The sounds of the social interactions between the guests function as individual acoustic layers which come together to create a general impression of aural depth and perspective. This paints a reliable picture of the overall acoustic experience of the feast. We clearly remain within the confines of Bran's perception throughout, since we him become increasingly fatigued by the sheer volume of the noise; as his attention wanes, the sounds merge into a monolithic, cacophonous wall of intrusive noise. Thus Bran's aural experience of the feast supports our description of the acoustic space in *A Song of Ice and Fire* as a combination of adjacent, concentric sonic bubbles

which have a natural tendency to protect their distinct identity. As we submerge ourselves in the blend of sounds in the Great Hall, we experience a multi-layered sonic experience. When we disengage our attention from the acoustic space of the feast, the bubble of sound closes around us and becomes opaque. Consequently the noise of the feast becomes less distinctive and no longer spreads outside seeking to engage our attention. Thus we see once again how the acoustic layout of a scene is dominated by the social context rather than the physical ramifications of an acoustic background template.

This is an opportune point to take a look at the characters whose acoustic relationship with their environment is particularly relevant. This mainly happens in relation to silence; the character we will focus on in this context is Lady Lysa Arryn. Given her troubled life, it is no surprise that the concept of silence symbolises the secret tragedy which permeates the unhappy fortunes of Lord Tully of Riverrun's younger daughter.

The secret relationship between Lysa and Petyr Baelish, the secret abortion she is forced to undergo at the insistence of her father mindful of the exigencies of feudal politics, and her subsequent arranged marriage to Jon Arryn give the character an aura of silence over the years. Subsequently, the sinister edge which Arryn's silence acquires in the course of the story is steadily aggravated, as his secret murder by Lysa and Petyr adds yet more secretive character to the doomed history of the ancient House.

All this creates of an unnatural, oppressive, sickly kind of silence that oozes through the imagery of the narrative whenever Lysa appears or is referred to:

Lysa Arryn held her silence behind the high walls of the Eyrie.

A Game of Thrones, 298

“When he had already agreed to foster that weakling son of hers at Casterly Rock? I think not. She knew the boy's life would be hostage to her silence. [...]”

A Game of Thrones, 84

The idea of silence is largely responsible for the unique character of the setting of the Eyrie and the Vale of Arryn:

Silence hung over the Eyrie.

A Game of Thrones, 410

In effect, silence becomes a key element in creating the aura of arid sterility; it feels as though it is meant to be imposed upon the environment with every thought and gesture and then in turn echoed by it. This is shown during Tyrion's forced sojourn into the mountainous fortress:

The High Hall of the Arryns was long and austere, with a forbidding coldness to its walls of blue-veined white marble, but the faces around him had been colder by far. The power of Casterly Rock was far away, and there were no friends of the Lannisters in the Vale of Arryn. Submission and silence would have been his best defenses.

A Game of Thrones, 382

"*Silence!*" Lysa Arryn's pale round face had turned a burning pink.

A Game of Thrones, 388

Lady Lysa raised a hand for silence.

A Game of Thrones, 390

Nowhere is the gloomy quality that silence bestows upon the ancestral seat of the House of Arryn more palpable than when it is focalised through the much fatigued and melancholic perception of Sansa Stark:

The snow drifted down and down, all in ghostly silence, and lay thick and unbroken on the ground. All color had fled the world outside. It was a place of whites and blacks and greys.

A Clash of Kings, 744

Outside the flakes drifted down as soft and silent as memory.

A Clash of Kings, 743

No one sang up there, not since Marillion. No one ever laughed too loud. Even the gods were silent. The Eyrie boasted a sept, but no septon; a godswood, but no heart tree. No prayers are answered here, she often thought, though some days she felt so lonely she had to try. Only the wind answered

her, sighing endlessly around the seven slim white towers and rattling the Moon Door every time it gusted.

A Feast for Crows, 483

After the deathly silence of the Eyrie, she yearned for shouts and laughter.

A Feast for Crows, 492

Perhaps the clearest way of grasping the imagery of Sansa's cheerless stay at her aunt's is to compare the aura exuding from the above passages with the pithy, exuberant silence which pulsed in the godswood of Winterfell at the early stages of the narrative. Here the silence of the Eyrie is primarily centreless, mirroring its physical and spiritual emptiness. Although the endemic quiet of the castle provides no counterpoint to the contemplative atmosphere of the godswood, it does not cause the silence to expand with any definable character or presence. Instead, it leaves it hanging lifeless over the entire place, contributing to the sensation of a loss of dimensions and a sense of distance. As is common elsewhere in Martin's secondary world, sound and silence travel concentrically and, in order to expand, they need a sense of a vibrant centre. Indeed, the oppressive character of the silence of the Eyrie is not the result of a defined, monolithic presence bearing down on one's perception; it comes from imposing a sense of dislocation, disorientation depriving one of the natural comfort of relating to reliable points of orientation. In other words, the experience of silence at the Eyrie is, in fact, an experience of an aural fog and consists in evoking the sensation of encountering an absence where one might expect a reassuring presence. In that sense the passivity and indeterminate, non-symbiotic character of the Eyrie's silence make it indeed "deathly" in an unhealthy, unnatural kind of way. It is no coincidence, then, that the collocation of "deathly silence" appears in the whole of the narrative only in relation to the Eyrie and to the Others.

Indeed, during the period immediately following Lysa's murder, which in itself becomes the final chapter in the sequence of secret tragedies which mark the recent history of the House of Arryn, the acoustic atmosphere of the Eyrie is further aggravated by its transformation, at least for the focalising Sansa, into the intensely oppressive

experience of being constantly exposed to Marillion's gruesome minstrelsy coming for the castle's notorious sky cells:

[...] All her nights were full of song, and by day she prayed for silence. If the Eyrie had been made like other castles, only rats and gaolers would have heard the dead man singing. Dungeon walls were thick enough to swallow songs and screams alike. But the sky cells had a wall of empty air, so every chord the dead man played flew free to echo off the stony shoulders of the Giant's Lance. [...]

No matter where she went in the castle, Sansa could not escape the music. It floated up the winding tower steps, found her naked in her bath, supped with her at dusk, and stole into her bedchamber even when she latched the shutters tight. It came in on the cold thin air, and like the air, it chilled her.

A Feast for Crows, 115

The centreless acoustic environment of the Eyrie helps Marillion's wretched singing resonate with an unnatural air resembling the foggy silence from earlier. As elsewhere in Martin's secondary world, there is something sinister about a sound which is not bound to any definite spatial location within limits delineated by other concentric spatial units yet it penetrates all space regardless of any acoustic plausibility. For all its persistent character, the cheerless music is yet another result of a crime stifled into a prolonged tragedy of inexpression. In that sense, it becomes a new form of the familiar, unnatural silence which is so typical of the Eyrie. This is largely due to the fact that, because of the air of inarticulate grief pervading the minstrel's song, the effect is centred on exposing and mapping out the indeterminate template of emptiness which the persistent silence previously drew from the castle's environment. This immanent aura is further filtered through Sansa's gentle, keen and imaginative sensibilities, reinforcing all the underlying "deathly" connotation. For Sansa, Marillion becomes a kind of "living ghost" – an accomplice in her own attempted murder as well as being a scapegoat, who, becoming a victim of the intrigues of the nobility, is condemned to bypassing his own death and gradually turning into a "dead man" whose only claim to existence is to be resident in the echo rebounding off the castle walls and the surrounding mountains. Thus, as

a result of Baelish's bizarre display of grace and mercy, the minstrel is sentenced to merge with the eerie emptiness of the castle; the entire process turns the castle's acoustic space inside out, with the manic soundscape of the sky cells enveloping the Eyrie in an incessant echo and thus making the castle become one big acoustic *oubliette*.

In the final act of this cruel drama, the boundary between the actual physical sensation and its mental reverberations is rendered less definite as the young Robert Arryn complains of being constantly exposed to Marillion's singing long after the minstrel is declared to have committed suicide.

Another important point is that the prominence of the element of silence in the characterisation of Lysa Arryn and the Eyrie is mirrored in the prolonged description of the slow process of Lord Hoster Tully's death as focalised by Catelyn.

Here the dying old man's inability to communicate becomes the chief feature of the manner of his passing. More crucially, as Lord Hoster's most desperate attempts at reaching out to the outside world happen when he imagines he is talking to Lysa and tries to ask her forgiveness, we can relate the sterile silence surrounding Lysa to the inexpressive silence of the physical weakness swallowing her father's desperate attempts to confess and seek forgiveness. Thus the ineffectiveness of the struggle unites father and daughter in one final silent tragedy:

The Lord of Riverrun went silently.

A Feast for Crows, 520

Arya Stark is another character who develops a special relationship with silence in the course of the narrative. As she progressively internalises the mantra-like prescriptions of Syrio Florel, the phrase "quiet/silent as a shadow" gradually ceases to function as an uttered admonition to self-discipline:

(Quiet as a shadow, she told herself, light as a feather.)

A Game of Thrones, 317

Silent as a shadow, she would tell herself, remembering Syrio.

A Feast for Crows, 250

Instead, it becomes a formulaic phrase used constantly as part of the description of the agility of her movements:

She crawled in and out of windows, hopped over walls, and felt her way through dark cellars, quiet as a shadow.

A Game of Thrones, 499

Silent as a shadow, she told herself as she moved through the trees

A Clash of Kings, 190

Quiet as a shadow, she moved back down the stairs. Outside the lord's solar she paused to listen at the door, easing it open slowly when she heard only silence.

A Clash of Kings, 555

Silent as a shadow, Arya moved between rows of long stone benches, her sword in hand.

A Feast for Crows, 76

She padded to her basin on small, bare, callused feet, silent as a shadow, splashed cool water on her face, patted herself dry.

A Feast for Crows, 971

Silent as a shadow, Arya moved.

A Feast for Crows, 76

In one sense, the phrase's ascent from the character's utterances to the level of narratorial characterisation is interesting in that it creates a descriptive formula which, echoing the grand style of heroic verse, plays a significant part in bringing the young heroine closer to the legacy of legacy of the heroic epic. This is an interesting element of the conventions of Arya's interlaced narrative strain, being, for the most part, written in a style classified as *documentary realism*. This is born out of questioning the high-minded premises of the traditional heroic style in order to introduce a more direct, realistic approach to tackle those aspects of the experience of war which fell beyond the traditional heroic decorum.

Another interesting element of aural perception, introduced in the narrative through the character of Arya, is the motif of the "silent

prayer". Before the phrase gains a sudden prominence in the narrative we are, in the course of the first three volumes of *A Song of Ice and Fire*, witness Arya's numerous recitations of her vindictive silent litany listing the names of those responsible for the deaths or misfortunes of her loved ones. As such, the silent prayer steadily gains more meaning as it becomes a symbolic sign of both the general moral degradation of a world sinking ever deeper into the chaos of war and of the growing desperation with which individual characters seek to confront the spiritual dimension. Thus, various characters take up the "silent prayer" to deal with the strain of their extensive misfortunes. Thus, while Arya continues her daily incantations throughout the narrative, we also witness the "silent prayers" of Davos Seaworth in *A Clash of Kings* (509), Catelyn Stark in *A Storm of Swords* (196), Aeron Greyjoy, his brother Euron and Brienne in *A Feast for Crows* (19, 220, 111, respectively), and finally Daenerys, Barristan Selmy, Jon Snow and Victarion Greyjoy in *A Dance with Dragons* (67, 1207, 772, 1208, respectively). It is thus clear that the motif becomes increasingly significant as a means of highlighting the desperate longing for some sort of spiritual foothold, experienced by growing numbers of characters in the face of hopelessness and tragedy of war; such a foothold is perilously difficult to gain in the tortured and fractured spirituality of *A Song of Ice and Fire*. The apparent silence of the gods thus becomes increasingly intense, and it is more frequently evoked as a defining sentiment in a particular scene. We are acutely aware of the sinister air that the motif introduces into scenes such as that of Ramsay Bolton's wedding ceremony:

After a moment of silent prayer, the man and woman rose again.

A Dance with Dragons, 804

Again, it is present in the ceremony of Arya acquiring a new face and identity in the Temple of the Many Faced God in Braavos:

The kindly man took the iron lantern off its hook and led her past the still black pool and the rows of dark and silent gods, to the steps at the rear of the temple.

A Dance with Dragons, 1371

Yet, for all that, poignant glimpses of something reminiscent of a providential scheme of retribution also appear at this stage of the narrative. During the funeral of her father, Cersei speaks with her cousin and one time lover Lancel Lannister; protective of her as yet undisclosed contribution to Lancel's keenly felt weight of moral guilt and newly found religious fervour, she uses the phrase "silent prayer" in an almost blasphemous way, given our present context:

"Atonement is best achieved through prayer," Cersei told him. "Silent prayer."

A Feast for Crows, 83

Although Lancel never publicly reveals their relationship, one cannot but hear this particular comment echoing through Cersei's desperate rage which she experiences after her arrest by the Faith Militant:

Silently she prayed for her accusers to suffer sudden, painful deaths.

A Dance with Dragons, 1172

The motif of the "silent prayer" is an elegant example of a dynamically developed element of characterisation which grows out of the basic fabric of the narrative and is then gradually unveiled as a major marker in defining the sense of moral and spiritual disintegration and decadence which becomes an increasingly important factor in Martin's epic tale. In one sense, the motif of silence marks the growing chasm between the fortunes of the secondary world at a given time and its spiritual core. In this context the symbolic function performed by silence is its similar to Tolkien's work. On the other hand, an absence of a single underlying spiritual template and the fact that the experience of silence is key in character focalisation has the somewhat paradoxical effect of tightening the connection between the spiritual and the material universe; this is because its primary function is to mark the increasingly overwhelming nature of the challenges faced by the characters.

Here, as in other aspects discussed above, on the face of it the adoption of the narrative technique whereby we follow individual

characters' points of view distances *A Song of Ice and Fire* from the medieval heritage in aspects such as the perception of sound. However, as we have seen, the adoption of the internal point of view has the paradoxical effect of echoing the legacy of pre-cartesian perception in a way which is fundamentally distinct from Tolkien. This is because the medievalised setting is conveyed in a way based on contemporary notions of realism. The modern concept of realism is defined as a presentation of concrete, tangible imagery rooted in immediate sensory perception; this definition reflects the context of the formal realist novel as it was developed during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Martin reformulates this model, choosing to vindicate individual responses of the characters to their environments and lives by deconstructing objectivised, universal perceptual templates which bring personal experience under the common denominator of scientific rationalism in modern times. In this sense, Martin follows the potential subjectivity of the medieval model of perception and its impressionistic character to rationalise its foundations by relating them back to the sensory experience and mental response to the surrounding environment which gave rise to it in the first place. In other words, following the individual point of view reveals how the characters interact with the medievalised setting and imagery in which they function, juxtaposing this against the modern notion of realism which reflects the living condition in such an environment and the cultural preconceptions relating to this particular society. Thus, in Tolkien's narratives, the legacy of medieval spatial and aural cognition is echoed in the semiotic perspective of the act of perception by evoking ethical symbolism typical of the medieval mode of interaction with the environment. Conversely, Martin's work interacts with medieval heritage on a layer of textual hermeneutics; it seeks to re-evaluate the avowed objectivity of the medieval narrative in the intrinsically fragmented context of a modern narrative which conveys an interlaced story as an interplay of many internally focalised plotlines. Thus, in the context of drawing on the legacy of medieval cognition as present in contemporaneous literary texts, Martin's approach seems to bypass the Tolkienian tradition altogether to create a fresh model which holds no intertextual relation to Tolkien's work.

The fundamentals of individual cognition and psychological interaction with the environment are as crucial to the encoding of specific cultures or civilisations as their ideological and ethical principles, and they are generally more intimate. Any interplay with these fundamentals in a work which aims to avail itself of the civilisation's legacy calls for the utmost sensitivity of approach and delicacy of artistic design. The subtle character of the overall effect may make the exercise seem too contrived to be worth the effort. However, a closer examination of the texture of a literary work reveals that it is this quality which leaves the reader with the deepest sense of having witnessed a precious triumph of literary craft and imagination.

Conclusion

In the course of the argument developed on the pages of this book, we have traced some of the various forms and ways in which the work of the two most important exponents of the genre of high fantasy – J. R. R. Tolkien and George R. R. Martin – relate to the literary heritage of the medieval period. The varied methodological and thematic nature of our argument was intended to encompass the widest possible context for examining this particular aspect of their literary output. Both the scope and intricate character of the secondary worlds created in the body of texts through which their respective visions are unveiled fully allow for an extensive study of such a form of intercultural dialogue with the past, as the medieval legacy operates here in distinct ways on various levels which lend themselves to literary analysis.

While the approach adopted throughout the presented argument was based upon treating the fictional secondary worlds as autonomous and consistent literary creations which emerge in the wake of a holistic synthesis of a number of texts, we have, at the same time, sought to make the most of each text's generic, stylistic and cultural context, so as to account in the fullest possible way for any divergences, inconsistencies, and the fine detail of the aesthetic design, as often get reflected in the consecutive stages of the creative process of a work of art.

Thus, in the first part of the argument the aim of the analysis was to discuss the ways in which these sophisticated examples of the genre of heroic fantasy seek to recall the medieval cultural heritage, by creating fictional worlds which aim to reflect the pre-modern condition of life, by developing fictional settings which are modelled on the physical realities and specific character of human civilisation during the centuries traditionally known as the Middle Ages. The goal here was to discuss how the underlying design in these literary texts extends far beyond merely imitating pre-modern imagery and including selected conventional concepts and semantic signs which most obviously connote with the motion of medievalism in the popular mind. The focus was to elucidate the full complexity behind the artistic objective evident in the work of both authors: to recreate, for the fictional secondary worlds, a workable model of human civilisation as it functioned at the time when most of the immediate cultural heritage of the genre of heroic fantasy was forged.

In practice, this approach meant attempting to recreate a specific form of fictional reality which would reflect the mental propensities from a time when the faculty of memory was perceived as the most central of the five internal senses, by means of which the human mind was able to orient itself in the surrounding reality and exercise properly the highest faculties of *intellectus* and *voluntas*. This fact, being in itself one of the fundamental characteristics of a society still to a large degree defined by the traits of oral culture, entails great significance for the idea of the past and its impact upon the perception of the present. Hence the prominence of the idea of the mythical, heroic past in the contemporaneous literary works which have exerted a formative influence upon the literary model of the modern high fantasy texts. In the different cultural context of contemporary culture in which modern high fantasy originated, it is solely through the frame of the secondary world that the level of the heroic past may be consistently and equitably developed within a fictional reality. Needless to say, the fictional reality thus created has a different status vis-a-vis the conception of realism than it did in medieval texts. Yet, by developing a certain interplay between the mythical level and the level of the plot, works of heroic fantasy become endowed with a literary apparatus which allows authors not only to reformulate

medieval ideas about the past, but to address, in a variety of ways, some of the most fundamental questions pertaining to the status of individual identity, which form part of the existential dilemmas incumbent on the modern condition of life. It may be in fact said that, in modern high fantasy, the frame of the fantastic secondary world allows the mythical concept of reality to reach out to the modern mind and provide a context which invests it with a fresh existential dimension. In this way, an exercise in literary craft may become a tool for bringing together the distinct cultures from different periods in human civilisation.

The next part of the argument was designed to penetrate deeper into the texture of the examined narratives, to explore the links of intertextual references, conventional motifs and generic traditions existing in the context of a single element of the imagery of the literary texts in question. The element of the forest, selected for this analysis, lends itself singularly for this sort of discussion for two reasons. First, it constitutes a ubiquitous and prominent element of the setting of any narrative placed in a fictional reality which corresponds to the actual character of the natural landscape of the pre-modern world. Secondly, and more crucially, because the idea of the forest has for millennia provided the central context in which some key, cornerstone concepts were reflected and absorbed. Thus, the concept of the forest has served to define such fundamental notions as the idea of otherness, of mankind's relationship with the natural world, but also of the ultimate escape from civilisation. It is within these relations of binarity that the concept of the forest crystallised during the medieval period, and it is this heritage of cultural reference and literary motif that serves as a backdrop for the imaginative visions unveiling in the secondary worlds of Tolkien and Martin. As we have seen, in the case of Tolkien the forest functions as a complex ecosystem existing as a component part of the world of Nature, which is conceived of, in turn, as a part of the hierarchical, yet complementary, design immanent in Creation which is preordained as a reciprocal defence against the corruption of evil. In the case of Martin, the forest is a part of the powerful and independent natural world destined to stand apart from human civilisation, in a world where the mutual interpenetration of respective realms may only bring about

the destruction of both. The key thing from our perspective is that the two distinct, original visions of the two authors are both created, to a substantial degree, with recourse to the same narrative motifs which originated in the medieval literary tradition.

Finally, we moved on to treat the most subtle and delicate layer of medieval cultural heritage, namely the question of how the contemporaneous modes of mental cognition were reflected in the literary tradition of the period, and how the use of that tradition may have influenced the modern narrative founded upon a different set of cognitive principles. The analysis in this final chapter adopted a different methodological perspective in order to account for instances when recourse to the medieval textual tradition may have the effect of bringing with it some element of the underlying cognitive propensities, and also to develop a consistent model of the acoustic space and aural perception which the two respective authors envisaged for the secondary worlds they brought to life. This meant that, to a significant degree, the medieval heritage was here recalled in the capacity of a contrastive analogue rather than any straightforward influence. In this way, the legacy of medieval cognition and the resultant cultural tradition conditioned by it provides a sort of stained glass filter through which the characteristics of the literary texts subject to analysis here may be perceived in an additional dimension. Consequently, we have observed how the literary world of Tolkien reflects more intimately the philosophical principles upon which medieval cognition was founded, while the work of Martin is in more intimate contact with the textual realities of medieval fiction and attempts to reinterpret these in the context of the modern traditions of narrative focalisation.

All in all, the overall concept for this book has been to demonstrate the variety and differing nature of the multifarious ways in which a literary work of art can reflect the tradition of a different period in human civilisation. A parallel aim has also been to present how the individual approaches and philosophy behind the creation of two fictional worlds may remodel the very same cultural legacy into distinctive interpretations, which are capable of becoming vital expressions of an existential outlook on the human condition in the context of contemporary reality.

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